Boys’ Literacy
Teacher Inquiry Project
2005 to 2008

Supplement:
Individual Team Reports

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
Final School Report: 2008
Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Ottawa-Carleton District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
A.Y. Jackson Secondary School — Grades 9-12

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This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
**Essential Question:**
How can stakeholders (parents, teachers, and administrators) create an environment in which boys can engage in literacy activities both comfortably and confidently? Does creating this environment improve achievement and/or attitudes related to literacy?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Peer/teacher modeling is a powerful tool to get boys to “buy in” to literacy activities.
- An immediate reward/pay-off should be present and communicated. This can take the form of external motivation, or the explicit statement of purpose and what will be gained from engaging in the activity.
- It is essential to relate reading to social interaction — communicating that the large group is reading is a social motivator.
- Choice and self-selection of texts are important.
- Competition increases interest.
- Parental involvement increases boys’ engagement.
- Technology is a powerful literacy tool.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

- We realized the importance of working as a team. All staff members participated in our “SHHGAR” (Shhh..Go And Read) reading period, and in turn, it was quite successful.
- Teachers are reading “to” their students more often.
- In English classes, there has been significant movement towards students choosing books, and the purchasing of new texts.
- Inquiry-based learning is being used more frequently.
- We communicate the purpose for reading on a more regular basis.
- Staff were introduced to a variety of pre/post reading strategies.

**Student Quote:**
(On the guys-only writing workshop)
“The presenter made me think about the things that go on in the minds of artists and it was amazing. He made me think about writing and being a writer. I am really inspired — what a great influence. And it was way less embarrassing than if girls were there.”
What is our story?

Three years ago, we embarked on a journey to involve all stakeholders (teachers, administrators, parents, and community members) in creating “literate” young men. Our theory was that boys needed support from all stakeholders to feel comfortable and confident enough to engage in literacy activities. We approached a variety of community groups including our local chamber of commerce and our professional hockey team. We requested that parents get involved and model reading to boys. And, although there was interest and support, the details could not get formalized in the given time frame.

Hence, we scaled down. We focused instead on our own school community. What could we do in our school to inspire boys to interact with the concepts of literacy and, in doing so, prepare them to leave and continue to read and write and, hopefully, become male role models for others?

While we were making changes to our essential question, our team was changing as well. The change of personnel due to transfers, retirements, and maternity leaves was one of our bigger challenges. That being said, some things remained constant. We continued to work on a whole-school model — our team was made up of at least one person from each department — and we worked exceptionally hard to create a supportive environment for our boys.

Some of our highlights include a rejuvenated in-class reading period — students renamed it, new purchases were made, some teachers read aloud to their classes, and we ran a major contest. Overall, we now have whole school buy-in for an endeavour which has proven to have an effect on literacy achievement levels. We also think that we have created a culture where boys feel welcome to read and write. On a bi-weekly basis (barring technical difficulties), we broadcast a book review, usually male-led, on our in-house TV station. We then raffle off the book in the library at lunch time. In addition, we ran a “guys-only” writing workshop for 12 boys, who came away very motivated to write. Our “literacy boot camp” has been very successful in helping at-risk students perform well on the OSSLT.

In closing, we want to highlight what we are perhaps most proud of. When we began, it was almost “cool” for a boy to be a self-proclaimed non-reader in our school. We like to think, through our efforts, that some boys who may have thought that way, now do not and, in fact, see themselves as readers.

What are our next steps?

There are some successful initiatives we plan to continue such as SHHGar — our in-class reading period — and our book reviews. We feel that these initiatives have had a positive impact on our school culture. We have purchased a large number of new titles for the library, which are on display, and we will continue to ensure that purchases take into account the preferences of both genders. Next year, we will add a boys’ book club in which we will work with more non-fiction, which our boys seem to enjoy. We will also continue to offer guys-only writing workshops, should finances allow.

We recognize that literacy can take many forms, and that how boys read and write is often encouraged by technology. We are very excited about our purchase of a portable lab of Alphasmarts that will allow students to type right at their desks, and hopefully make writing less intimidating. We are looking forward to the impact the Alphasmarts will have, particularly in our Applied level classes.

We have already participated in a sharing of literacy practices with a representative from each school in our board, and will continue to do so.

Parent/Guardian Quote: (after reading To Kill a Mockingbird along with her son)

“Firstly, I really enjoyed the book. I read at the same time as my son so we could discuss what we had just read. I found it to be helpful to be involved with his study. It gave me the ability to aid my son to understand the text, characters, and plots.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

In order to answer our essential question, “How can stakeholders (parents, teachers, and administrators) create an environment in which boys can engage in literacy activities both comfortably and confidently? Does creating this environment improve achievement and/or attitudes related to literacy?” we looked at both observational and quantitative data.

In March 2006, we asked our grade 9 students a variety of questions about their reading habits. We then asked the same questions of our grade 11 students (the same students) in 2008. We selected the boys’ responses to the questionnaires and compiled the data using EXCEL. We chose to do this survey in order to get a sense of our boys’ habits and to see if, by the end of the project, there had been any change.

We borrowed the questions from the questionnaire on the back of the literacy test and all had multiple choice responses. The questions were:

- **Do you read the following types of material in the English language outside of school?** Answers required circling YES or NO. Types of materials were: non-fiction books, comics, web sites/e-mail/chat/text messages, letters, magazines, manuals/instructions, newspapers, novels/fiction/short stories, song lyrics/poems, and religious/spiritual writings.

- **Indicate the number of hours you spend in a week reading non-school related materials written in English.** There were four possible answers ranging from one hour or less to five hours or more.

- **Indicate the types of writing you do in English outside of school most weeks.** Answers required circling YES or NO. Types of writing were: e-mail/chat/text messages, letters/journals/diaries, notes/directions/instructions, song lyrics/poems, stories/fiction, and work-related writing.

- **Indicate the number of hours in a week you write in English outside of school, not including your homework.** There were four possible answers ranging from one hour or less to five hours or more.

We also kept a tally of the number of students taking part in a number of initiatives connected to our project in order to keep track of boys’ participation. Hence, we tracked how many boys took part in our weekly SHHGAR contest (month of May 2008), how many participated in our boys’ book review raffles (10 since March), and how many checked out our new purchases in the library.

We examined our students’ achievement on the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) in relation to the rest of the province, paying special attention to the success rates of our boys and other students involved in our literacy “boot camp”. For the “boot camp”, we pulled students out of classes to work with them in small groups in the weeks leading up to the OSSLT and concentrated on the reinforcement of skills necessary to complete the OSSLT successfully.

We also convened regularly as a committee to discuss observational data regarding changes in attitudes among students and staff, as well as to share “good news” stories.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Survey of Reading/Writing Habits
When we began the inquiry project, we conducted a survey of our grade 9 students, and then had the same students complete the survey two years later. In those two years, we made an attempt to create a “literacy-friendly” environment for boys by providing male role models reading and through on-screen book reviews and posters. We also added an element of competition by introducing two contests — one contest to rename our in-class reading period formally known as DEAR, and another contest that allowed students to win prizes for reading in class. We ran a boys’ book club, sent home novels with struggling readers, and generally tried to message that we are a “reading school” and that boys who attend A.Y. Jackson read.

When we looked at the data from the second administration of the questionnaire, completed by students when they were in grade 11, we found the results encouraging:
- In grade 9, 12% of our boys reported reading non-fiction compared with 39% when they were in grade 11.
- In grade 9, 74% of our boys interacted with websites, email, chat, etc. compared with 94% when they were in grade 11.
- In grade 9, 38% of our boys read newspapers compared with 60% when they were in grade 11.
- Novels/Fiction/Short stories were read outside of class by 43% of our grade 9 boys compared with 58% when they were in grade 11.
- Song lyrics and poems were read by 24% of our grade 9 boys compared with 51% when they were in grade 11.
- In grade 9, 22% of our boys were writing poems and song lyrics, compared with 31% when they were in grade 11.

The remaining results on the surveys were comparable in terms of percentages. Initially, we were disappointed that the time spent reading outside of class had not changed considerably over the two years, although the lowest possible response (one hour or less) dropped by 6%. However, we would like to contextualize this result a bit. A huge segment of our grade 11 student population has a part-time job, so we view the fact that their reading habits have held steady as a gain.

Literacy Test Results
For each year we have been involved in the inquiry project, our school’s performance has been higher than the provincial average. This year, based on preliminary results, the provincial pass rate is 84%, and our pass rate is 92%.

In addition, for each of the past three years, we ran a “literacy boot camp” for students who were identified as at-risk of being unsuccessful on the test. This year, staff gave us the names of 62 students and 45 of the 62 attended. Nine of those 45 students were unsuccessful on the test, and only three of them were boys. We think the small group support, instruction, and feedback really benefited our students. We also worked in mostly gender-specific groups, which allowed our boys to feel more comfortable.

SHHGAR Contest
We have a weekly reading period of twenty minutes. Our current program is called SHHGAR (Shhh..Go And Read) and, anecdotally, our participation as a school in the program was pretty dismal prior to the project. However, through supplying new reading material, such as the Ottawa Sun newspaper, and new purchases for the library, we saw participation go up (according to informal feedback from the staff). Now, we are running a SHHGAR contest, where students get a ballot to win prizes simply by being “caught” reading by a staff member. As a result, we now have a 63-66% participation rate in SHHGAR.
**FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)**

**Book Reviews**
We televised book reviews, usually conducted by boys, and then raffled off a copy of the book in the library at lunch time. We kept a running tally of how many boys and girls entered to win the book. As illustrated by the following chart, boys entered to win more often. We believe that this illustrates that the reviews messaged that it was okay for boys to read, and that boys respond to external motivation or a sense of competition.

![Bar chart showing Entrants by Gender for Book Review Raffles](chart.png)

**Other Notable Data**
We sent home a novel with struggling students during their summer vacation between grades 9 and 10 and included a set of reading strategies for the parent to use to help the student. Of the 21 students who received books, 19 are maintaining their level of achievement or improving in their English classes this year.

We have seen more boys checking out library books and picking up newspapers in the library than prior to the inquiry project. More boys are also now recommending titles to the teacher-librarian.

We would also like to share that at the beginning of the project, two of our team members met with three focus groups of boys. We took much of the information from those focus groups and used it to drive our decisions about the kinds of activities with which to engage and the kinds of texts to purchase.

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

The inquiry project has had a significant impact on us individually and collectively. Our awareness of the issues surrounding boys' literacy was certainly heightened and the impact will be felt by all of us for years to come.

Specifically, the project encouraged us to focus on our teaching techniques — the need for differentiated instruction became more apparent. One teacher felt that differentiated instruction was all about learning styles, but suddenly realized that gender was a factor in instruction as well.

Now, we all take the time to talk with and highlight boys who are reading, both formally and informally. We understand that it is important for boys to see reading modeled, so we often engage in informal discussion with boys about what they are reading. Now, we notice a struggling male student faster, and we now understand better the reasons for their struggles. More importantly, we now feel we have some tools and strategies to help those struggling students, including new texts and reading strategies. Our ways of choosing texts for both the classroom and the library have changed over time, as well. More often, boys' needs are being taken into account when selecting texts.

The collection of data was always a struggle for us, partly because we were a large committee trying to have an impact on more than 800 students. If we could do it all over again, I'm not sure we would have dreamed that big. That being said, I do think, that despite busy schedules, we came together both as a committee and a staff, to help our boys succeed.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys: Generally, graphic novels, newspapers, and non-fiction
- The Guiness Book of World Records
- Homeland by R. A. Salvatore, Lord Loss by Darren Shan
- The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time by Mark Haddon
- The Global Warming Handbook by David Rothschild, Long Way Gone by Ishmael Beah
- Bleach (Graphic Novel Series) by Tite Kubo

For professional development:
- The EOSDN conference Reaching Higher, Reaching Wider in Kingston, Ontario
- Differentiating Instruction in the Regular Classroom by Diane Heacox
- Any of the books by Jeff Wilhelm

Team Member Quote:
“This inquiry project brought so many issues to the forefront for us. We saw the struggles of the male adolescent student. We tried to make a difference. We saw the need to work as a team like never before. For the first time in a long time, instead of being 60 staff captains directing our own ships, we actually sailed together.”

Administrator Quote:
“I loved seeing boys on JTV talk about books and recommend books. I enjoyed conversations with boys who I met randomly around the school about what they are reading. And the conversations are comfortable and not out of the ordinary. They even give ME books to read. There has been a real shift in the culture of the school about boys and reading.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
book reviews; peer modeling; whole-school; literacy test; contest/competition
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Adelaide Hoodless Public School — Grades 4-8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
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Susan Jackson-Bosher
Kevin Heer
**Essential Question:** Do more varied resources that are engaging to boys, such as an array of magazines, graphic novels, non-fiction, and novels, and the use of more inclusive teaching practices such as guided reading and writing, help all boys, regardless of their level of competency in literacy, improve and become more engaged in literacy?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

Boys love literacy! They love reading and writing, speaking about their ideas, and synthesizing information in creative and expressive ways and they can be highly successful. At the beginning, many of our boys were disengaged with literacy activities, had very little self-confidence in expressing their ideas, and admitted they did not understand what they were reading. To help our boys with reading, we implemented new initiatives related to both resources and programming. For example, it is absolutely necessary that classroom libraries be engaging. A classroom library should include many non-fiction texts at different levels, as well as graphic novels, traditional novels, newspapers, magazines, and on-line texts. When the resources are in classrooms, there are opportunities for immediate choices. Our boys constantly saw new engaging texts.

A good classroom library is not enough. Boys need validation that their choices of texts are good choices. We found that such validation was significant in changing boys' motivation related to literacy activities. That is, the boys need an advocate to reassure them that reading is reading, and that a choice of a graphic novel is just as good a choice as a traditional text. This advocacy made a difference in boys' success in all aspects of literacy instruction.

Boys need to talk! We provided opportunities and encouraged boys to chat in literature circles and whole-class discussions and, as a result, we found they developed deeper meaning from what they read and demonstrated higher-level thinking. The “talk” process also needs to be validated for boys. Our boys needed modeled, shared, and guided practice to give them confidence. We also found that, generally, boys do not enjoy the physical task of writing. We experimented with various alternatives to paper-and-pencil tasks such as the use of a digital voice recorder. We found that computers help boys write their ideas without worrying (especially in junior grades) about neatness and a lack of fine motor skills. Boys quickly realized that they were actually quite good at a subject they thought they “hated”.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

This project has helped bring about a sea change in the way literacy is taught and assessed at our school—we have implemented a comprehensive approach to literacy instruction and assessment in all our classrooms. This implementation has been at different paces for different teachers. We now use an approach of modeled, shared, guided, and independent lessons. We use literature circles in each of our classrooms.

We found that focusing on specific aspects of reading and writing (such as inferring, making connections, and synthesizing in reading; or ideas, organization, and voice in writing) helped students hone their specific skills and helped teachers focus their assessments. Our instruction was guided by our boys’ strengths and needs related to reading and writing.

We differentiated assessment and evaluation for boys, which provided them more opportunities for success. For example, we employed book conferences instead of book reports, tapping into boys’ enthusiasm for talk. This approach encouraged boys to read more, knowing that at the end they would not be required to do a book report. We focussed on metacognition and taught boys to think about what aspects of the reading and writing processes helped them to self-evaluate, become motivated, and increase their confidence.

**Student Quote:**

On graphic novels: “They really help me get into reading.”

On literature circles: “I really hated reading, I thought it sucked. It was one thing I’d never do unless I had to. But now, I really like it. Literature circles helped me because I could talk without being told to work quietly.”

On reading: “Reading really inspired me to do other things. I even got a spelling tutor.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Adelaide Hoodless is an inner-city school in a community with a number of social issues and parents with varying skill levels. Our school experiences a high level of student turnover each year and often a high turnover rate of staff. While we have many challenges, our rewards for teaching in this environment are tremendous. Guiding students to improve from where they are when they come to us motivates us and makes teaching at our school truly gratifying.

Many of our students, both girls and boys, struggle with literacy skills. Often, students arrive without basic literacy skills and teachers routinely need to play “catch-up” to help students improve and succeed. Students often have a reduced schema or exposure to experiences which, makes connecting to text more difficult and, in turn, hinders comprehension. Indeed, many of the students’ parents are themselves struggling readers. Again, while these challenges can become barriers to learning, we are a team of dedicated teachers who know that literacy is the key to students’ futures. We recognize that literacy skills are probably the most important skills our students will use in their daily lives, and the better their skills, the better their lives will be. As a result, we strive to work hard to address our students’ needs.

We noted that, like other jurisdictions throughout the province, our boys’ reading and writing skills lagged behind our girls. We wanted to address this gap and have discovered, through this project, many new approaches and experienced many successes. In addition to changing our instructional and assessment practices and increasing resources significantly, we put strategies such as boys’ reading clubs at lunch in place to help struggling readers early in their schooling. We put interventions in place during the school day and many of our greatest successes were achieved through this particular initiative this year. Some teachers have a “homework club” after school, where students can stay and read one-on-one with their teacher. Our communication with parents about “what to do” with their boys also increased and home support for literacy activities has grown.

Because of a high rate of staff turnover, our inquiry team, which was large at the beginning, has been reduced to a few. However, we found that the expertise of the remaining few and the willingness of the staff collectively to get involved have helped implement many of our initiatives and our boys have benefited. This inquiry project has created for our staff a renewed sense of purpose and energy as we experimented with new approaches and experienced success. Our administration has helped this process by mandating some of the new approaches to instruction and assessment, while being patient and encouraging as changes take place.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

This year, we saw how a teacher dedicated to intervention practices with a group of boys helps significantly in boys’ development of their literacy skills. The inquiry team feels strongly that we should increase intervention practices during the school day. We also need to make sure that this sort of intervention happens at an early age. By the time many boys reach middle school, the process is more difficult.

The intervention needs to employ the strategies on which we focused throughout our inquiry; that is, more engaging resources validated by a strong teacher advocate for boys and progressive teaching and assessment strategies.

We need to keep our classroom libraries current and innovative. School-wide magazine subscriptions is one specific way to keep resources current. Much of our inquiry project focused on reading and, while we did not abandon writing as a focus, it was only during this last year that we turned our attention to the writing component. We need to continue to assist boys in their writing skills and indeed we have made some good strides toward that goal this year.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“My son will now pick up a book and read without being told to do so.”

“I find my son is more interested in reading over the last year.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

We gathered both quantitative and qualitative data.

Quantitative Data

Our sources of quantitative data were DRA scores, report card marks, EQAO results, and running records.

We first determined which quantitative data sources would best reveal our boys' levels of achievement in literacy and their strengths and weaknesses, and which sources would help us plan our inquiry project and adjust our programs. We also wanted to determine which sources of quantitative data were not helpful. Because of the high rate of student turnover, we found that comparing report card grades year-to-year was not helpful — we could not get a clear indication of the success of our boys because the pool of students was so small. In addition, teachers were at different stages of implementation and their comfort levels varied thus invalidating year-to-year comparisons of data.

Year-to-year comparisons of EQAO data created problems for the same reasons, though to a lesser degree. For example, 2003-04 grade 3 EQAO results indicated that only 10% of our boys achieved at Level 3 or above in reading and we were encouraged when the 2006-07 grade 6 results indicated that 30% of the boys achieved at Level 3 or above. While this data showed improvement, we realized, on closer examination, that only 11 boys remained in our school throughout the project. There were boys who entered and left our school at various stages of the project and certainly benefitted from the changes we were making, but it was difficult to use grades 3 and 6 EQAO results to track the changes. Of course, EQAO is only administered for grades 3 and 6, which is a disadvantage for students enrolled in all grades 4-8.

We did find that specific EQAO data helped us much more. We compared boys' specific answers, which led to many teacher moderation sessions, identification of specific areas where our boys were struggling, and the creation of S.M.A.R.T. goals to help them. Our boys were having the most difficulty with summarizing and citing text in their answers. The EQAO data revealed trends in student learning that we were unaware existed. The data helped drive instruction and assessment and we feel confident that the changes we made in focus and approach helped our boys score higher on these tests, and much more importantly, improve their literacy skills.

We believe the most beneficial quantitative data was the DRA scores. Because DRA measures engagement, oral reading fluency, and comprehension skills and strategies (with additional sub-categories), and because DRA is administered in the fall and spring of each year, the data we gathered in the fall drove our instruction and assessment practices and led to success in the spring. Student turnover mattered very little with DRA because the data was gathered in one school year.

Qualitative Data

Our sources of qualitative data were anecdotal notes, interest surveys, conferencing, and self-assessments.

Qualitative data was much more valuable in helping our boys. This year, we identified a small target group from each of grades 4-6 comprised of boys who were struggling significantly with literacy. A LRT was assigned to work with these boys twice a month to teach, assess, encourage, and monitor them as they worked on specific reading and writing skills. These target groups gave us significant insights into what motivates boys, what the barriers are to improving their skills, and how best to meet their needs. The LRT collected qualitative data through surveys, self-assessments, and anecdotal notes. We also collected running records data. Through working with these target groups, we expanded our project from the classroom to intervention groups and evaluated the effectiveness of this strategy in helping our boys.

Summary

All our data provided us with direction for instruction and assessment. The data showed us boys' weaknesses and led to the establishment of SMART goals and implementation of changes in instruction and assessment practices that helped our boys.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

What Our Data Showed About Instruction

Our data showed interesting differences and causes of weaknesses in boys’ literacy skills in different grades. We found that the weaknesses for boys in grades 4-6 were similar to boys in grades 7-8; however, we discovered the reasons for those weaknesses were quite different. The DRA results showed us that the grades 4-8 boys struggled with wide-reading, self-assessment, summary, reflection, and meta-cognitive awareness. The reasons the junior boys were weaker were because of gaps in reading skills and an underdeveloped schema. These boys needed targeted instruction in specific reading strategies like determining importance, making connections, inferencing, synthesizing, and visualizing. As a result, we initiated modeled, shared, and guided reading tasks with the assistance of a school-based Literacy Improvement Teacher.

The intermediate boys were weak in the same areas as were the junior boys but, overall, the biggest challenge for the intermediate boys was a lack of motivation. Simply changing the conditions of the assessments by having the boys type their answers to DRA instead of writing their answers improved scores dramatically. We discovered the differences in the reasons our boys were struggling at the different grade levels through qualitative methods such as surveys and conferencing. The quantitative data and qualitative data worked in concert to produce a more complete picture of our boys’ struggles and the reasons for their struggles. This information helped us to determine the best ways to help our boys. The DRA results also helped us to identify a group of boys in each grade who were struggling throughout the spectrum of DRA categories and those boys then became our target groups for intervention with one of our Learning Resource Teachers.

*Sample Chart Used to Track DRA Scores Comparing Results For Fall and Spring Assessments

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<th>Boys</th>
<th>Wide-Reading</th>
<th>Self-Assessment</th>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
<th>Meta-Cognitive</th>
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</table>

*This data was displayed on a board to remind teachers where boys' deficiencies were occurring. This chart is a truncated example of how that data was displayed. Student names have been removed to protect privacy. Highlighted levels show growth areas.

**Numbers here represent levels from 1-4 as per the DRA assessment process.

***Grade 4 students used fiction in the fall and non-fiction in the spring. Grade 8 students had a choice in both assessments.

What Our Data Showed About Assessment

As mentioned above, our grade 8 boys simply were unmotivated by the assessment tasks and the physical task of writing answers. Changing the assessments to allow the boys to type their answers rather than write them dramatically improved their results. We attempted to employ more opportunities for boys to use technology to write their responses. We also worked as a team through teacher moderation to develop focus areas for instruction, whether in reading or writing, and then we empowered our boys by having them generate rubrics. For example, we had a persuasive writing assignment and decided to focus on ideas, organization, and voice. We limited the sections of the writing which would be assessed in order to help our boys concentrate on those specific areas of writing. The boys helped develop the assessment rubric. Boys now had ownership of their work and understood clearly from the beginning what they needed to do and how to do it. This process helped motivation and drove assessment forward.
**FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)**

What Our Data Showed About The Impact of the Changes to Instruction and Assessment

The qualitative and quantitative data we collected indicated the areas where our boys were struggling and suggested directions we could take to help overcome the difficulties. We felt that the best way to demonstrate our process of collecting and analyzing data and using that data to drive instruction and assessment was to tell “One Boy’s Story”.

“Boy” started grade 4 as a struggling reader and writer. He was very talkative and easily distracted and he would often fidget at his desk. He had a great deal of difficulty with spelling and fine motor skills. Getting “Boy” to talk about something was never a problem; however, getting him to write about it was another story. Often times, only one sentence would appear on the page and, in that sentence, there were so many spelling errors that reading it was next to impossible. It was clear that “Boy” was frustrated. He would often show this frustration by hitting himself on the head, banging his head on his desk, or bursting into tears. He would often say, “I am so mad at myself.” Little by little, “Boy” would tune out lessons and would need much encouragement to participate in class — even in activities he once participated in without a problem. His self-esteem was at an all time low. “Boy’s” DRA scores in the fall were low. He was given a text at the grade 4 level (level 40) but could not read this well enough to be tested at this level. Instead, he needed to be tested with the DRA “Bridge Kit” at a level 30. Knowing that he did not “make the cut” frustrated “Boy” even more. His fall DRA score placed him at a grade 2 reading level. His DRA data confirmed what we suspected from our observational data.

This data indicated to us that “Boy” needed to be included in the Boy’s Literacy study. Once a week, he was taken out of the room with a group of boys to work on reading skills in a small group setting. He enjoyed this and realized that he was improving: “I read and got better and better.” In the small group guided reading sessions, we were able to listen more closely to what “Boy” had to say about what he was reading. It became apparent that his schema was strong and we learned that non-fiction was his preferred genre. This student, whom we once viewed as unfocused and unable to retain much information, demonstrated that he could read and talk about a non-fiction text months after we read it in guided reading. For example, we read a book about bees and many months later he recalled, “the queen wasps hide underground all winter so they never die.” The conferencing and subsequent observational data we collected pointed to the need to include many more non-fiction choices in the classroom library. Soon after we added the texts, “Boy” was caught reading voluntarily.

Anecdotal notes also helped us record that “Boy” had taken to sketching cartoons during class. We surmised the next genre of text to try was graphic novels and “Boy” took to them immediately, surprised that he was allowed to read that kind of book in class. “Boy” read these books constantly and later said, “Those books really helped me get into reading.”

Having gained some confidence and literacy skills, “Boy” began enjoying literature circles (also because he could talk and be social). He loved being able to share with his peer group and it soon became apparent that he could be a leader at times. At the end of each session, his name would almost always appear on the, “Caught You Doing a Great Job in Literature Circles” chart and this encouraged him even more. Giving “Boy” another way to attack reading (talking and listening about books) boosted his self-esteem. Suddenly, he was able to demonstrate that he could use some of the higher-level thinking strategies learned through guided reading that gave him so much difficulty at the start of the year. For example, the role of Passage Picker in literature circles requires a student to use inferencing skills. “Boy” stated his new found confidence perfectly: “I hated (that role) at first, but now I really like it. That’s why when you said I could be Passage Picker, I was really happy.”

Helping “Boy” become a “happy reader” was our first goal. As the year progressed, we noticed how he participated more in class, added more detail to written work, and devoured more and more books. Once he started reading and his self-confidence increased, we were better able to address some of his weaker skills. “Boy’s” teacher used DRA data and the observational data as a guide to know what to do with instruction and assessment and then put those plans into place to help “Boy” succeed. Obviously, she was very pleased.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

This inquiry project impacted us in many ways. Initially, we found ourselves very much in an experimental stage—developing new ideas, trying new resources, and attempting new strategies. As the project went on, team members left, new members were added, and the ministry and OISE/UT researcher helped us to focus our goals. The project led us to rethink many aspects of our literacy program in general, including the materials we were using, how our literacy program was delivered, and how we assessed the progress of our students. We re-evaluated what we were doing constantly and worked to improve our practices in the classroom. We had more focused discussions, did more problem-solving, and engaged in more risk-taking. We conducted more teacher moderation to improve evaluation of students’ work.

Complacency around the school decreased and a new energy entered our classrooms. One initiative at the board level, which helped our process significantly, was the addition of a Literacy Improvement Teacher to our school—a teacher dedicated solely to improving students’ literacy levels. This teacher helped our inquiry team implement many of our new programming and assessment initiatives and helped individual teachers and students try new things. The inquiry process reaffirmed for us that teachers must be life-long learners and must be open to trying new approaches and taking risks.

Perhaps one of the most valuable impacts of our inquiry project is that we have grown to know our male students better. We understand better their needs which are indeed different from those of their female counterparts. Boys’ approaches to learning literacy skills are different; the texts they value are different; and they lack self-confidence and often try desperately to hide it. We learned that it is important to show boys that their choices in literacy are valid, that they have better literacy skills than they know, that it is “OK” and “cool” to improve their literacy skills, and that high levels of literacy help them to succeed in their lives. The inquiry project team feels that we have exited this process much richer than we entered it.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Graphic novels, non-fiction texts, digital voice recorders, internet access in classrooms, science-fiction, mystery, adventure and action, magazines, newspapers, on-line texts, short-stories, graphic organizers, writing templates, and access to computers to type written work

For professional development:
A Guide to Effective Literacy Instruction Grades 4-6 Vol. 4 and 5; Nelson Literacy 4-8 Program; Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups by Harvey Daniels; Teaching for Deep Comprehension by Linda J. Dorn and Carla Soffos; Better Answers by Ardith Davis Cole; Strategies That Work by Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis; Even Hockey Players Read by David Booth

Team Member Quote:
“The best resource for boys is an advocate and literacy role-model; that is, providing boys with engaging texts, validating their choices of text, encouraging their ideas and approaches, and motivating them to improve.”
“This inquiry project has made me rethink and revamp my program. I think it is important for teachers to keep learning and changing. It is easy to become complacent, but being a part of this project forced me to stay on my toes. It gave me the opportunity to look at how I differentiate my program to meet the needs of boys.”

Administrator Quote:
“Engaging all students is critical to their success. Through this study, we were able to address the needs of boys so they became engaged in their reading. Their excitement in reading will have a deep impact on their educational progress throughout their lives. Through this study we have developed some “best practices” that will help us as educators move our students forward.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes: literature circles; comprehensive literacy; teacher moderation; differentiated instruction; teacher advocate
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Toronto District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Agnes Macphail Public School — Grades 4 to 6 and Teacher Librarian

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Diana Maliszewski
Lisa Daley
Julie Tran
Mary Jane Huh
Farah Wadia
**Essential Question:** How can graphic novels used in FRED (Free Reading Every Day) time, incorporated in curriculum areas, and combined with instructional strategies improve: (1) attitudes towards reading and writing, and (2) reading preferences?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- It is essential to provide a variety of rich fiction and non-fiction texts in the classroom so that boys will be more interested and engaged in their reading.

- If we had not provided an excellent selection of graphic novels in the classroom, our readers who were struggling the most would have had difficulties finding books that were of interest to them.

- Existing background knowledge regarding graphic novels helps students make meaningful connections while reading.

- When provided with differentiated learning opportunities, our struggling students tended to choose a graphic novel format.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

- We now see the value of using graphic novels for guided reading and Literature Circles.

- We have become comfortable using graphic novels for instruction and assessment.

**Student Quote:**
“I like silent reading time because that’s the time when everything calms down and I can read graphic novels. I get to feel what it’s like to be in the story and it’s really cool. I like having graphic novels in our classroom because it’s a new thing to experience….they aren’t as long as regular novels and they are exciting, especially with the pictures so that I can see what’s going on.”

[teachinginquiry@oise.utoronto.ca](mailto:teachinginquiry@oise.utoronto.ca)

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

We heard about the Boys’ Literacy Project funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education through our Teacher-Librarian, Diana Maliszewski. She approached us about the use of graphic novels to improve boys’ literacy skills. We agreed and purchased collections of graphic novels to be housed in each junior classroom and a separate collection for the school library. We took our students on field trips to the GTA Resource Fair and to Tinlids (Book Store/Warehouse) to purchase the graphic novels. Students practiced critical thinking and math skills while choosing and tallying their purchases. The purchasing experience proved to be extremely meaningful for the students because they had an opportunity to select the graphic novels and had a say in what was purchased.

Free reading periods have never been so quiet and productive!

Five junior students accompanied by the Teacher Librarian delivered an in-service for teachers titled, “Answering Questions About Graphic Novels and Comics”. The teachers were very impressed with the knowledge and passion the boys brought to the subject.

We had a professional comic artist, Richard Comely, come and show small teams of students how to plan and produce their own quality comics. We published an anthology of the results. Many concepts were covered such as thinking skills: media analysis; arts-based: storyboard; cooperative learning; and activity-based learning.

We and the Teacher Librarian were provided with release time to meet for collaborative planning, sharing of best practices, collecting data consistently, and planning for the use of common teaching strategies. These are the hallmarks of a true professional community and fit with our other school initiatives. We ordered sets of graphic novels for guided reading and generated black-line masters in order to achieve consistency in guided reading lessons across the Junior Division. This was a team building experience for us.

During this last year, we topped up our classroom collections and purchased additional volumes to complete sets. We were provided with release time to reflect on the success of the Boys’ Literacy Project and plan next steps.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

Through available funds, we will maintain our class collections of graphic novels so students have access to a continuing variety of graphic novels. We will look into purchasing and creating more guided reading sets for the Junior Division. We will also continue to provide students with the opportunity to use Comic Life (a software program) for various tasks (e.g., summative tasks).

Parent/Guardian Quote:
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Qualitative Data
We used two methods to collect qualitative data.

Our first method involved anecdotal notes and observations. In particular, we noted the boys’ attitudes towards reading and writing and their reading preferences during the following activities: grades 5 and 6 Social Studies projects, grades 4 and 5 Earth Day comic strips, grade 5 Charlotte’s Web project, Junior Division’s anthology of graphic texts, library book exchange periods, and observations during independent reading time. By looking at our anecdotal notes and observations, we wanted to determine whether the use of graphic texts improved students’ attitudes towards reading and writing.

Our second method of gathering qualitative data consisted of observing the content of student reflections (written and oral) and reading responses. For example, we made observations with respect to guided reading discussions, community circle discussions, reading response journals, book reports, end of project reflections, and literature letters. By observing the content of our students’ reflections and reading responses, we wanted to determine whether the use of graphic novels, when incorporated in various curriculum areas and combined with our other instructional strategies, improved: (1) attitudes towards reading and writing, and (2) reading preferences.

Quantitative Data
We utilized one method to collect quantitative data, which was to keep checklists of the boys’ reading preferences during FRED (Free Reading Every Day) time. Last year and this year, we tallied the boys’ reading preferences during 20 randomly selected days.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Qualitative Data Results
Analysis of our qualitative data revealed some themes. During our guided reading sessions, students were visibly and verbally excited about the prospect of using graphic novels. What a great motivational lead-in!

Last year, the grade 5 class entered a contest sponsored by the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Raptors’ Read to Achieve Program. The class worked collaboratively to produce a class literacy project based on the book, Charlotte’s Web in anticipation of the movie release. Much to the students’ delight, they won the grand prize which was a trip to the movie theatre for a private viewing of Charlotte’s Web with members of the Toronto Raptors. How did the use of graphic novels help the students win this contest? Their exposure to graphic novels through the purchase of classroom and library collections increased their knowledge of graphic novel conventions. The students applied this knowledge when creating their own versions of Charlotte’s Web stories in graphic text formats. Furthermore, the students’ general excitement surrounding anything to do with graphic novels provided extra motivation and interest.

In Social Studies class, both grades 5 and 6 students were presented with a cumulative task. Students were given a variety of visual and written formats from which to choose to complete the cumulative task. It is interesting that comic strips were one of the choices. This differentiated approach addressed the learning needs of our students and helped them to recognize their strengths and showcase them appropriately.

During book exchange periods, we junior teachers observed that at least one class makes a “beeline” for the graphic novel section. Additionally, when checking out books, generally at least one of the books selected is a graphic novel.

Our grades 4/5 teachers noticed a trend when looking over their students’ reading response journals. At least half of the responses were based on graphic novels.

Quantitative Data Results
Our quantitative data regarding boy’s reading preferences during independent reading time are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Last Year’s Data (2006-07)</th>
<th>This Year’s Data (2007-08)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 58% of boys chose graphic novels.</td>
<td>• 52.3% of boys chose graphic novels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 88.5% of boys who chose graphic novels were either moderately to heavily engaged while reading.</td>
<td>• Of all the boys who chose graphic novels, we identified reluctant readers. Using them as a separate pool, we discovered that reluctant readers chose graphic novels 70% of the time. Quite telling!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Last year’s data was collected after the completion of the Forest of Reading program. This year’s data was collected during the Forest of Reading program. Despite the fact that the Forest of Reading program occurred the same time as our data collection, it did not significantly affect the boys’ preferences when choosing texts during independent reading time.

When we analyzed this year’s data, we thought it would be interesting to dig deeper into our data and identify our reluctant readers. We wanted to see whether our reluctant readers had a greater tendency to choose graphic novels. Our suspicions were confirmed by the data. Our reluctant readers chose graphic novels 70% of the time versus the whole population of boys in the Junior Division who chose graphic novels 52.3% of the time. This statistic is very important to us because it begs the question, “What would our reluctant readers be reading if they didn’t have graphic novels?”
**WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?**

This inquiry project could not have come at a better time! Our school has been developing Professional Learning Communities over the course of the last three years. This project has enabled teachers to spend more time working collaboratively.

Graphic novels are here to stay! This form of text that embraces popular culture needs to be recognized as a valid form of reading material and an instructional tool. As noted in our data analysis, graphic novels are an effective tool for improving student motivation towards learning. It is important not to treat this as a one-time project, but to continue to nourish and maintain it.

This project has helped us to realize how graphic novels, media literacy, and technology are integrated. For example, in the use of Comic Life to publish graphic texts.

The most evident success is how excited the students are about reading graphic novels, how they are more motivated during independent reading time, and how they are more likely to complete projects that involve graphic texts.

The greatest challenge is that the students are so enthusiastic that they read through the graphic novel collections very quickly. We need to have a yearly budget for graphic novels for our library and classrooms.

**WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?**

For Boys:
It is hard to highlight a couple of series as so many are popular. A few examples of the more popular series are:
- Bone
- Legendz
- Full Metal Alchemist

For professional development:
- In Graphic Detail by David Booth and Kathleen Gould Lundy
- Teacher’s Guide for MERIDIAN: Fostering Critical Thinking Skills by Beth Widera et. al.

**Team Member Quote:**
“I was pleasantly surprised when I discovered some of my more reluctant readers showed more enthusiasm towards reading graphic novels.”

**Administrator Quote:**

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
- graphic novels
- comics
- graphic texts
- graphic novel features
- popular culture texts
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Northern District School Area Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Armstrong Public School — Grades 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
M. Gustafson
C. Dagenais
J. Clouthier
G. Armstrong
**Essential Question:** How can we get boys to read more?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- We continue to believe that boys will read what personally interests them.
- The boys’ high interest in computers/technology and music was a surprise to some of our team members.
- The CASI Reading Attitude Survey indicated that our boys overwhelmingly enjoy going to the library.
- The provision of a wide range of graphic novels to our school in February had a tremendous impact on the number of books taken out of the library and read.
- Having a librarian in place and as a partner has been a huge contribution this year.
- Our recent training in CASI provided us with the Interest and Attitude Surveys to collect our data this year.
- Developmentally, our team is in its first steps of the inquiry process. We look forward to continuing our journey and probably our own culminating milestone in two years time.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

- At this time, there is not much impact as we are mainly concerned in restarting our inquiry project and do not have prior data for which we can respond.
- We implemented CASI in this last term only, but we see it as a valuable tool.
- We are placing more value on book bins.
- We continue to make observations and form new questions.

**Student Quote:**
“I find comic books easy because they are easy words to say. I find science books hard to read because they have words I do not know.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Our school is a member of an Educational Authority with a student population composed of 90% First Nations Students. We frequently face large staff turnovers and, after such a changeover, our Boys’ Literacy Team members found themselves as initiates in a project without prior knowledge. As a result, at this time, we find ourselves at the beginning of the project rather than in the culminating stages.

Our school was a Turn Around School and has had terrific supports in the form of resources and training, as well as the support of ministry documents. Our team felt that our focus should be on the boys in our junior/intermediate classes.

We know the majority of our boys come from literature deprived homes and generally enter our school over 10 months behind in literacy and language. We believe that some catch-up can be achieved if we provide literacy-rich environments for our students.

Our starting point this year was to follow the lead of the articles in the December 2007 Work Plan Support Booklet and invest in graphic novels and Multi-genre texts. We formed a partnership with our new librarian and stood back to make some observations. We found an instant impact related to these new purchases as students were attempting to withdraw the new books from the librarian’s desk before she had time to get them bar-coded. Our classroom teachers focused on making careful choices in their school libraries and book bins.

We observed that it is important to make many interesting books that support curriculum available, but the books seem to have extra appeal if they are perceived to be new and the book bins are changed frequently.

This year, we experienced a bombardment of in-service (i.e., capacity building, SMART boards, CASI, PLC’s, Junior Literacy Strategies, Oral Literacy, and Tinkerplots). It has been invigorating, although a bit overwhelming.

We find ourselves at a juncture of consolidation and connection.

We decided to use our new CASI Interest and Attitude Surveys to provide us with preliminary data. This has provided us with a few connections, but we find ourselves at a starting point comparable to the first year and mostly generating more questions. Next year, we will refine our essential question and focus it more directly on gains in literacy skills.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

We will:

- incorporate students’ favorite reading choices into classroom lessons, especially choices related to music, computers, and technology;
- create team reviews after each term and share data results, observations, and any conclusions with the rest of the school staff;
- continue to evolve our essential question and develop connections with CASI;
- create and maintain better reading logs capable of providing meaningful data;
- collect data by term;
- purchase more graphic novels;
- incorporate our observations into the classrooms;
- change book bins frequently; and
- use a program like Sight-Line Readers for read along in junior/senior classes and do more classroom projects using computers.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“My son really started picking up reading near the end of the year because he started reading things that interested him. It depends on the interest.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Data Collection Methods

- CASI Reading Interest Surveys for grades 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8
- Favorite choices by grade and aggregated overall
- Least favorite choices
- CASI Reading Attitude Surveys (attitudes will become more important as we will collect data in the fall, mid-term, and spring next year)
- Reading Interviews to collect individual baseline data. We will make decisions early in the new school year about which questions we would like to use. We will most likely choose the following questions:
  > Do you think you are a good reader?
  > How do you know? (This response may be of interest as we know from the students’ DRA results which students are actually good readers.)
  > How often do you read when you are not at school?
  > What kind of reading do you do using technology?
  > As a reader, what would you like to do better?
# FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

**CASl Reading Interests Inventory: Student Form — Responses From Boys in Grades 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8**

## Most liked

| Grade 4 | 
|---|---|
| Comic books | Games |
| Sports | Music |
| Computers/technology | 

| Grade 5 | 
|---|---|
| Mysteries | Riddles and jokes |
| Relationships/friendship | Sports |
| Pets | 

| Grade 6 | 
|---|---|
| Legends | Adventure |
| Mysteries | Games |
| Music | Sports |
| War | 

| Grade 7 | 
|---|---|
| Adventure | Comic books |
| Games | Sports |
| Letters/e-mail | Computers/technology |

| Grade 8 | 
|---|---|
| Mysteries | Games |
| Music | Relationships/friendship |
| Sports | 

## Least liked

| Grade 4 | 
|---|---|
| Interviews | Diaries and Journals |

| Grade 5 | 
|---|---|
| Newspapers | Diaries or journals |
| Romance | 

| Grade 6 | 
|---|---|
| Newspapers | Autobiographies |

| Grade 7 | 
|---|---|
| Textbooks | Autobiographies |
| Romance | 

| Grade 8 | 
|---|---|
| Textbooks | Interviews |
| Plants | 

## Overall Aggregate Choices for Boys in Grades 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8

### Likes

- Sports
- Music
- Computers/technology
- War
- Comic Books

### Dislikes

- Poems
- Romance
- Magazines

(See chart on next page)
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Boy's Literacy

Scores

CASI Reading Attitude Survey

- I enjoy going to the library — question most strongly agreed to (almost unanimous for all grades)
- Reading is boring — question most strongly disagreed to (equal strong response from both fluent and challenged readers)
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

Preliminary Conclusions

- We want to maintain our librarian as a valuable partner.
- We will monitor and maintain classroom book bins.
- We need to make use of computers in the reading and writing process.
- We will revisit the ministry document, *Me Read? No Way! A Practical Guide to Improving Boys’ Literacy Skills* and make reading and writing relevant to boys.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- Permabound/Graphic Novels — Adventures in Reading 2007-2008 at [www.perma-bound.com](http://www.perma-bound.com)
- The Garfield Series, Simpson’s Graphic Novels, Manga /Avatar
- *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*
- Mystery Books by Darren Shan,
- Humour — Andy Griffiths books such as *The Day My Butt Went Psycho*

For professional development:
- *Native Learning Styles* by John Michael
- *Building a Framework for Native Literacy* by Sean Fine
  - [www.opsba.org](http://www.opsba.org)

Team Member Quote:
"Graphic novels were a hit with everyone, but we need two to three dozen new titles turned over every term."

Administrator Quote:
"The Boys’ Literacy Project has increased the use of the library by students, especially the boys in grades 5-8. They have more interest in going to the library and are borrowing more books."

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
Aboriginal boys; graphic novels; CASI Interest Inventories; Casi Attitude Surveys; library
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Avon Maitland District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Arthur Meighen Public School — Grades 7 and 8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Jane Morris, Principal

2006-07
Danielle Mascolo
Christine Thrasher
Maria Abusow Pas
Judy Campbell
Ruth Lovell
Nancy Davis

2007-08
Candace McEwan
Christine Thrasher
Maria Abusow Pas
Ruth Lovell
Nancy Davis
**Essential Question:**
Will the availability of a wide variety of high interest, current resources geared toward a male audience in conjunction with the implementation of more interactive teaching strategies, such as literature circles, increase engagement and achievement for our intermediate male students?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

**Make it a habit**
- Ensure that all classes make time for independent reading. Protect that time from unnecessary interruptions. Students must be allowed to self-select the reading material during this time.

**Have the right stuff**
- Provide current non-fiction resources such as magazines and newspapers in all classrooms. Consider bundling non-fiction resources into bins that can be moved regularly from room to room to maintain variety and interest in the resources.
- Provide a wide variety of choice of novels for literature circles. Survey students’ interests and be willing to change selections throughout the course of the year. If a novel is popular, look for a sequel or another novel by the same author. Introduce the novel selections through brief “book talks”. Display copies of the book jackets in a reading area of the room to generate enthusiasm about the novels. Consider doing a literature circle exploration of graphic novels — this approach was very popular with our grade 8 students in June!

**Let them talk**
- Use Harvey Daniels’ approach to literature circles to build talk time into reading reflections. His best practices guidelines are listed on p. 27 of “Me Read? No Way!”

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**
The most important impact, for our school, was that our numerous intermediate classrooms became more consistent in their instructional practices with respect to literacy. We developed some core expectations across the division, such as:
- uninterrupted, daily reading time with self-selected materials;
- the provision of a wide variety of reading materials; and
- the use of literature circles as an instructional strategy.

This past term, our intermediate staff began to explore common assessment practices and use teacher moderation as a means to develop more consistency.

Although the project itself did not impact directly on our instructional practices, the trust we developed among our team members will support us as we embark on this cycle of instruction.

**Student Quotes:**

“Lit circles helped me with reading comprehension because I got to hear other peoples’ ideas and heard them explain what they were thinking.” — Grade 7 student

“I started reading more when we got graphic novels.” — Grade 8 student
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

We used the ministry document *Me Read? No Way!* as a springboard for exploration and focused on the key strategies, “Have the Right Stuff” and “Make it a Habit”. We found that the availability of rich and varied resources such as magazines, newspapers, non-fiction texts, graphic novels, and books that reflect the interests of boys led to sustained silent and focused daily reading time for our boys in intermediate classrooms. At the end of the first year of the project, we concluded that engagement is critical to the improvement of both reading attitudes and achievement for boys as well as girls. On the year-end survey, many of our students reported that they enjoyed reading only when given an opportunity to choose reading material that appealed to their interests.

In the second year of the project, we continued to provide reading time and allocated additional resources to sustain the primary focus of the project. However, we also implemented literature circles in our intermediate division. As a result, in this past year, our project has focused more on the strategy, “Let them Talk”. Using Harvey Daniels’ resource, *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Circles*, as our guide, we surveyed our students to determine their interests, purchased a wide variety of novels — including graphic novels — and began to explore this instructional strategy to further engage the boys and, by extension, improve their reading comprehension.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

We will continue to support the project goals throughout our division and school. Last year, we shared our work with our local high school English teachers and would like to continue to work with them. Upon completion of this report, we expect to be able to share our observations and findings with our regional school partners and our local School Council and we may be called upon to share our work with the trustees.

We have recently completed a pathway of instruction, whereby we designed a common diagnostic writing assessment, marked it together, identified an area of focus, designed mini lessons, and then moderated the summative writing assessment. It is our intention to complete three of these instructional cycles in the 2008-09 school year.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

*teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca*  
This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

We began this project by focussing on our report card and CASI data as primary measurement tools. However, as we became increasingly aware of the critical role of boys' engagement in reading, our assessment tools shifted to "softer" data we collected through interviews, surveys, and focussed observation.

In November 2006, over a two week period, teachers in each intermediate classroom tracked the types of resources that each student was selecting during independent reading time. We used these checklists to prioritize the allocation of resources to meet the interests of the students for the next school year.

The 2006-07 year-end survey was completed in the last week of June and we met as a team to review the data on the last PA day. One of the most interesting findings was the collection of responses to the question, "Do you like to read?" While 68% of the girls said "yes", only 31% of the boys responded "yes". This did not surprise us. However, 52% of the boys stated, "It depends." This was very interesting. The following is a selection of their responses to, "It depends on what...":

"...if the book is something I'm interested in."
"...what mood I'm in."
"...if there are pictures."
"...if it is funny."
"I started reading more when we got graphic novels."
"...if it is worthwhile and entertaining."
"...if it is not too long or boring."
"...if I am reading about something I like."
"...if I get to choose it and you don't make me read it."

Their responses validated our observations that, when boys can select from a variety of rich resources, interest and engagement is sustained in daily silent reading.

In September 2007, we had our intermediate students complete an interest inventory. We collated these results onto class profiles and again attempted to allocate our resources to meet the interests of our students. We renewed magazine and newspaper subscriptions and purchased various non-fiction resources to maintain the interest and enthusiasm surrounding this initiative.

In the 2007-08 school year, we also administered a year-end survey. The questions replicated those from the previous year's survey. This final survey allowed us to observe the reading attitudes of our current grade 8 students over the past three years. We used the spring 2006 junior EQAO assessment as our baseline data, our 2006-07 survey as mid-point observables, and our 2007-08 survey for our final assessment data.

We focussed on two key questions: "Do you like to read? " and "Do you see yourself as a good reader? "Our target group was the male students currently in grade 8.

Tables A and B on the next page show the results from the spring 2006 EQAO assessment and our two year-end surveys for each of the two key questions.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?
DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Table A: “Do you see yourself as a good reader?” Grade 8 Males

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>EQAO Grade</th>
<th>Diagnostic Grade</th>
<th>Current Grade 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>EQAO</td>
<td>Diagnostic</td>
<td>Current Grade 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>EQAO</td>
<td>Diagnostic</td>
<td>Current Grade 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Diagnostic</td>
<td>Current Grade 8</td>
<td>Current Grade 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table B: “Do you like to read?” Grade 8 Males

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>EQAO Grade</th>
<th>Diagnostic Grade</th>
<th>Current Grade 8</th>
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<td>Diagnostic</td>
<td>Current Grade 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Diagnostic</td>
<td>Current Grade 8</td>
<td>Current Grade 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Observations:

Table A shows the results for the question, “Do you see yourself as a good reader?” We are pleased that our target group of approximately 50 grade 8 male students improved in how they perceived themselves as readers. By the end of the three year project, 65% of this population viewed themselves as good readers.

Table B shows the results for the question, “Do you like to read?” We were even more pleased with these results. In grade 6, 22% of the male students reported that they did not like to read. By the end of grade 8, this percentage was reduced to 8%. More importantly, for the purpose of this study, 30% of the boys reported that they enjoyed reading — another significant increase over the three years!

These results lead us to conclude that, as a result of this project, more of our boys are “reading for the love of it” in the intermediate grades. We are very proud of these results, especially given the challenges that educators face working with adolescent learners. It has become very apparent to us that “engagement” is critical. Our goal was to get our boys reading and enjoying the activity.

Finally, it should be noted that our female students were also positively impacted by this project. In grade 6, 11% of the female students reported that they did not like to read and, by the end of grade 8, none of the girls reported a dislike for reading.

Overall, very powerful findings!
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

As a division, we have developed more consistency in some of our literacy practices. We have a better understanding of each other’s philosophies and approaches to teaching and we have been able to support each other with the implementation and refinement of teaching practices. When we sat down to develop a common writing assessment a couple of months ago, we were able to work quickly and efficiently as a team. The project has enabled us to develop the trusting relationships that are required to be an effective divisional team.

We have each seen the impact of this project on many of our male students, and we have all come to recognize the importance of choice, variety, and engagement for the development of lifelong readers.

Also, we have come to recognize the importance of qualitative data as a means to capture evidence. The collection of qualitative data was important for what was at the core of our essential question; that is, finding a way to get our male students to “read for the love of it”.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Popular authors: Alex Horowitz
Norah McClintock
Garth Nix
Roland Smith

For professional development:
Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Circles by Harvey Daniels

Team Member Quote:
“The students are highly engaged in reading when given free choice.”

“We all get a deeper understanding of the text when given an opportunity to talk about our thinking and to hear the thoughts of others. Literature circles offer a powerful learning tool!”

Administrator Quote:
“One of the greatest challenges that we face as a result of this project is the question of sustainability. I need to find a way to continue to support the allocation of non-fiction resources, magazines, and newspapers to our intermediate classrooms. I also will need to think about how we continue to meet the interests of the students through resource allocation to literature circles. Students and teachers come to me now with suggestions for new novels for their literature circles and this will have to be a budget priority for the years to come!”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
choice; engagement; literature circles; non-fiction resources; graphic novels
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Simcoe County District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Bear Creek Secondary School – Grades 9, 10
Holly Meadows Elementary School – Grades 7, 8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Leanne Noble
Sue Ketcheson
Matthew Doucette
Sharon Butler
Mark Wilson
Colleen Trayherne
Janet Lee Stinson
Lorraine O’Halloran

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of
Essential Question:
How does the use of materials based on boys’ preferences affect their attitudes toward reading and their reading comprehension in grades 7-10?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

Through our research project several strategies were used that we believe would be effective if implemented by our colleagues. Understanding the needs of the individuals that you are teaching is imperative for any strategy to work. Therefore, the first step that needs to occur is that students be given a survey to discover where interests lie. Materials to help students enjoy reading and be more receptive to reading need to be chosen from these categories.

Once we discovered what kinds of materials students were interested in reading (that is, non-traditional reading materials including a wide variety of magazines, non-fiction texts and novels related to sports, fantasy and war), the materials were made readily available throughout our classrooms. This made the choice of what to read up to the student. No longer was the teacher making the decision about what the student would read. Students were shown that reading was more important than the specific material they chose to read.

Finally, we also discovered that when creating language groups, grouping students based on gender and ability created greater levels of success. Boys were more likely to complete all work and to be more engaged in what they were doing when they were paired up with other boys and had reading material that was of interest to them.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?
This inquiry project has made us reflect upon and redefine what constitutes appropriate reading materials for students in our classrooms. Prior to this, we all believed that reading should be from a certain type of novel, usually chosen by educators. The students’ likes and dislikes did not come into it. After completing this project, we now believe that reading does not have to come from a novel, in fact most boys prefer to read anything but a novel. This has affected our classrooms because now non-traditional resources are plentiful; therefore, giving boys many different reading materials to choose from. Thus when a silent reading period occurs, novels are not the only materials that are being read. The result is that we are now more focused on “assessment for learning” than we have ever been before.

Student Quote:
"I like this magazine so much I’m going to ask for a subscription for Christmas!"
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Our team of six teachers, students, and two board liaison staff set out to research whether the use of high interest materials would improve boys’ literacy skills. After extensive surveying, interviewing and observation we purchased high interest materials for use in class. Our collected data of exemplars, student interviews, surveys, anecdotal notes, and standardized test results showed that boys did indeed improve their literacy skills through the use of high interest materials.

One of the challenges that we faced was in communication. While both teachers and students benefited significantly from being able to participate in this project, we did experience some difficulties over the three year period. We experienced personnel changes in the form of administration (both schools had a new principal during the three year period), board liaison staff (changed after the first year) and teachers (changed slightly over the same period). This challenged the continuity of the research, increased the need for communication with new members and caused some issues with misplaced data of former team members. Reliable and consistent data collection became difficult. At times we felt great frustration with the communication from the Ministry of Education. The messages sent from the Ministry were unclear and contradictory. We were greatly disappointed that the initial promised funds for each of the three years of research were not forthcoming. The team feels strongly that sustainable resources require sustained funding.

The boys responded well to choice and excelled at reading/writing when interested in the material. Boys were motivated to complete work without teacher prompts when using high interest resources. Boys discussed and analyzed both literary and popular culture resources more effectively by making connections.

Parents/guardians are enthused at the increased level of literacy in their offspring. Parents/guardians’ philosophy towards what constitutes “quality” reading is evolving.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

The team will communicate with new administration about the importance of funding boys’ literacy. We will share learned information with our colleagues in a casual setting. The secondary school team will grow the program to include following the progress of the grade 10 students involved in this research study. “Growing the program” will be more significant at the elementary level because of another change of teaching staff. Having said this, the team will continue to use communication between the family of schools as a key learning tool. We will continue the paradigm shift in defining “quality” reading.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“'I've definitely noticed a difference in my son’s reading habits. Every night before bed he wants to read.'
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Through reading logs, video recordings, interest surveys, reading surveys, formative assessment, exemplar review, standardized test scores, teacher observation journals, and student journals, we noticed a marked increase in students’ interest in reading. Students began to seek out additional materials which correlated with their interests. Students put more effort into their responses to CASI type questions. Heightened interest in the material helped students to make inferences about what they read. A stress on “Oral Communication” in the classroom helped students to produce more detailed summaries and succinct thematic responses.

Questionnaires and Surveys
Students were given different versions of interest surveys from CASI and teacher-generated samples. In our first year, these surveys showed that students did not view themselves as readers. They did not view ‘reading the words on the computer screen’ and ‘reading for other purposes such as magazines and video gaming guides’ as reading. Throughout the course of our research inquiry, however, we observed the students’ answers changing; many have begun to see themselves as readers, placing value on their reading of alternatives to the traditional novel. Through the use of high level interest reading materials, students began to see themselves as part of the discussion in their Language and English classrooms.

Reading Logs
Students started to keep reading logs and various records of their reading associated with the new resources. These reading logs stemmed from oral discussion groups with peers. Detail began to emerge in their writing because students felt more comfortable referring to their chosen texts to support their opinions.

CASI, Formative and Summative Assessment, and Standardized Testing
CASI tests reading comprehension. We found that CASI is an excellent way to assess the progress of the grade 8 students; however, there is no version of CASI for grade 9 students. We discussed rewriting the CASI questions for the grade 9 students but were concerned about the validity of the questions we would create. Also, the grade 8 students who were tested at the end of the 2006 school year were scattered throughout the high school and therefore were very difficult to track.

Engagement/Time on Task
We found that students were very interested in the newly purchased resources. Attitudes towards reading changed when the new materials were introduced. We used explicit teaching strategies and the “gradual release model” to help students transfer the skills to other materials and subject areas. It was difficult to find the time to dialogue with other subject area teachers to gauge the progress of students.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Due to the nature of our research we found anecdotal observations the best method of displaying student growth in literacy.

“Part of our qualitative data included student surveys. Students were given different versions of interest surveys from CASI and teacher generated samples. These surveys initially showed that the male students did not identify themselves as readers. They did not value “reading on computers” and “reading for other purposes such as magazines and video gaming guides” as reading. Through the use of high interest reading materials, I saw my students evolve in their thinking, reading, and writing processes. Resources purchased after the use of teacher generated interest surveys resulted in increased motivation, increased production, and improved performances on assessments and evaluations for male students.”

Leanne Noble, teacher

“Graphical texts have helped with reading and comprehension questions as these texts were used to assess the boys' strengths and weaknesses in terms of reading comprehension. Before/During/After questions were used and, in addition, they focused on “watching what they read” and “seeing movies in their head”. Graphic novels were used to help give the boys a sense of what imagery is and how to properly read tone. Socratic dialogue was used to assess comprehension. The boys read a selection of graphical texts and their creativity and writing comprehension skills were assessed through the writing of a two-page book report in which they compared a short story with a graphic novel. This assessment was done with Frank Miller’s The Dark Knight Returns; a text where the graphical text is followed up with a short story version of the text. Lastly, in order to assess their understanding of interpreting literary terms with what they read, the students completed an oral presentation interpreting various images found within graphic novels. The students were able to constructively and adequately exceed the expectations. Their writing skills were strong and their creative thinking and observation skills were strong.”

Matt Doucette, teacher

“Through the use of observations in the classroom, we discovered that, when new material was brought into the classroom, it was immediately used whether it was the latest copy of Sports Illustrated or a new graphic novel. In fact, we noticed that the magazines were so popular they were often hoarded in students' desks and read so often that they were worn out. Continuing to supply the classroom with magazines is definitely a goal that needs to be continued.”

Sharon Butler, teacher

“In my grade 10 applied classes, I used questionnaires and surveys, as well as observations, to gather data and assess the effectiveness of the strategies employed. The most striking results were with my most recent group of grade 10 students. We added the novel Juice to the course through the Boys' Literacy Project and the students responded very well. The Independent Study Unit was altered to include a comparison of Go Ask Alice and Juice. I noted a marked difference in not only their engagement, but also the quality of the final product. All but one of the students submitted the Written Component (a pamphlet) of the project; this compares favourably to the previous class I taught, which had eight students (7 males) not complete the Written Component (traditional book journals). The class average for this component was 76%, as compared to the previous class which had a 58% average on that portion of the ISU. Ultimately the success rates were much higher for the boys who both enjoyed the new novel choice and the altered activity.”

Sue Ketcheson, teacher
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

As all members of the team reflected on the work that had been done over the last three years, we noted that our teaching philosophies and our definition of ‘good reading material’ has evolved, and will continue to grow. We have broken through the ‘traditional’ concepts of reading and have begun to accept and open up to the integration of a variety of learning materials in our classrooms. We have learned, first hand, the power that high interest materials can have on the level of engagement of the boys in our classrooms.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
As a group, we have found certain magazines and graphical texts invaluable and they were highly recommended as high interest materials by our male students. “Skateboarding, Snowboarding”, “Sports Illustrated” and “Bones” were all used and well received by male readers. Boys also found the novel Juice by Eric Walters captivating. We also found many invaluable resources to help us implement these new materials. We referenced these materials in order to best meet the needs of our male students.

For professional development:
“Strategies that Work: Classroom Kit”, “Me Read? No Way!”, “Making Comics”, “In Graphic Detail”, and “Reshaping High School English” are resources that we highly recommend.

Team Member Quote:
“Current magazine subscriptions were invaluable in my intermediate Language Arts classroom.”

Administrator Quote:
“Our male students have benefited greatly from this project. This research into boys’ literacy is a step on the pathway to achieving our goals of student success.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
graphical texts, magazines, literacy strategies, CASI, reading
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Bellmoore Public School — Grades JK-8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Elaine Stewart – JK
Bruce Simpson – K
Mary Bilowus – 1
Steve McCormack – 1
Joshua Massie – 1
Julie Nichols – 2/3
Ursula Vanderploeg - 2
Laurie Leavens – 3
Carrie Daniels – 4
Michelle McCoy – 4/5
Alexandra Allan – 5/6
Jason Tyrrell – 6
Lisa McLeod – 7
Kara Dalgleish – 7/8
Andrew Karamath – 8

Carol Hutchinson — LRT
Jeannette Wilkinson — LRT
Cheryl Banfield — LIPT
Angela Bonventre — French
Liana Scornaienchi — French
Jordana Smith – Library

teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
**Essential Question:** With the “right” resources in place and a deeper understanding of multiple learning styles, how do we develop stronger comprehension practices and extend richer responses from male student-readers? Will division-wide, data-driven SMART goals in literacy acquisition provide the intervention needed for reluctant male readers? Will explicit teaching of specific comprehension goal-based practices increase comprehension and maintain engagement of boys? Will task-oriented workshops for at-risk/reluctant/disengaged male readers aid in reader engagement?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Build your literacy resource base (bookroom, classroom, etc.). Perform a school-wide gap analysis of texts that would be needed for a comprehensive literacy program for boys, according to ministry and board recommendations and as advised in literature regarding boys’ literacy acquisition. This analysis will guide future spending. Hold publisher fairs for teachers to order texts as indicated in the gap analysis and allocate spending based on need, not on division, nor by the usual per student allocation. There needs to be equity across divisions.
- Utilize anticipatory activities or guides as they are important in activating prior knowledge, eliciting curiosity, provoking lateral or next-step thinking, and in grounding new learning in meaning-based inquiry. When student attention is gained through pre-reading activities or discussions, students begin to forge stronger connections to their reading and the topic or content area being studied.
- Explicitly teach/model, support, and guide how to make connections with texts. When students make connections with texts, whether the connections are text-to self, text-to-text or text to world, they are better able to understand and remember information efficiently and are more engaged with the text.
- Explicitly teach effective answering techniques for comprehension questions; for example, the Answer Sandwich Approach. Boys enjoy this procedural approach and it demystifies how to answer comprehension questions.
- Create literacy-based clubs for “at risk”, disengaged, or underachieving male readers. Facilitate literacy workshops that are based on students’ interests and activities. Keep the clubs active, productive, and task-oriented. Limit sedentary activities. Promote natural opportunities for discussion and “think outside of the book” (our club slogan).
- Ensure the use of technology that is interactive such as SMART Boards and software such as Comic Life, to enhance engagement, promote kinesthetic learning, and meet the needs of multiple intelligences using differentiated instruction.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

Data drove our instruction, which in turn directed us to obtain appropriate resources and employ the best instructional practices. Engagement is essential. Reading choices must reflect the students as individuals, their likes or preferences in content and style, and their achievement levels. SMART Boards, software, art, and media lead to male engagement and allow for visual literacy in relation to boys’ visual-spatial strengths. When students have ownership of the topic/task, they will respond with enthusiasm and demonstrate greater independence. In classrooms and literacy clubs, boys demonstrate higher engagement in activities when they are in motion or manipulating materials. The dynamics of small groups foster a greater willingness to participate. A fine balance must be maintained between the decomposition of literature and the maintenance of reading as a rewarding and pleasurable activity. We gained greater expertise at staying within proximal zones, providing multiple entry points, delivering written feedback with next steps, and providing rubrics as a guide to inform students of expectations. It is essential that teachers stay abreast of the latest research on literacy acquisition. We learned to differentiate to the learning needs of our students, providing authentic reading activities where students are aware of their purposes for reading. We found that achievement scores rose with establishment of high standards. When planning, divisional SMART goals should direct instruction, safeguard proper collection of data, and ensure critical analysis within timelines.

**Student Quote:**

While working on the computers to research how to post items to eBay, how to build a rocket or remote control car, or while baking gingerbread houses, the staff repeatedly heard:

“I didn’t know this is reading. This is fun!” — Bellmoore Students
**WHAT IS OUR STORY?**

Our focus was always to engage males in literacy learning. We moved through a continuum of finding the “right resources” to learning and utilizing the “right strategies” and looping back after analyzing data and creating new SMART goals.

**Year One**

After establishing what an ideal comprehensive program would look like, we began by ordering the “right resources”. We administered attitude and interest surveys and ordered materials based on a gap-analysis. We revealed the bookroom on a “Boys Read to Succeed Night”, at which Dr. Spence, Director of HWDSB and author of *Creating a Literacy Environment for Boys*, spoke about the influence of male role models and what parents can do to help. Teachers and students demonstrated the “shared reading technique” using some of our new resources. Our boys’ literacy clubs included two models: (1) The traditional format of reading a book with follow-up or hands-on, workshop-style activities related to interests and (2) The teacher in a more social setting that fosters natural discussion. The first model produced better engagement. Parents were thankful for the resources and assisted with leveling books for the bookroom. The school council supported our “Boomer, the Bookworm” which tracks quantity of student reading and rewards students at key intervals.

**Year Two**

We needed a fresh look at comprehensive literacy and professional development for the best strategies for male readers. We implemented a variety of strategies as indicated in *Me Read? No Way!* We hired a Differentiated Instruction teacher and offered a model program for visiting teachers. This provided a wealth of knowledge and support. The school employed explicit teaching strategies through a comprehensive literacy approach of shared, guided, and independent reading. We used Diagnostic Reading Assessment scores as baseline data and shared them regularly and posted a DRA tracking board. Data was the foundation for instructing students with a more holistic DI approach. We continued with junior and intermediate clubs with a mission to improve engagement through student interest and hands-on activities and to provide a social setting for students to hone their skills (i.e., development of a Nature Watch program — WormWatch).

**Year Three**

We formalized divisional literacy goals using the SMART goal approach derived from standardized and non-standardized data. Divisions specialized in particular areas of comprehension, narrowing the focus and investing proportionately more time in the area of need. A literacy improvement teacher was assigned to Bellmoore, two days per week, to assist in developing and co-leading lessons that would engage students and improve comprehension. Bellmoore offered a Parent Literacy Workshop to share with parents how literacy acquisition is taught in the classroom and how to promote engagement at home. We continued the Boys’ Literacy Clubs, involving some of the same students as in year one and two and some new students. We expanded the clubs to the primary division and included a “Lord Of the Rings Literacy Club”, which promoted discussion and creative thinking.

**WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?**

We still need to look at boys’ engagement and think about how we can influence boys’ who still remain disinterested in reading. Will divisions capture this as part of their SMART goals for next year? How do we continue to help students to master comprehension strategies, improve reading skills, and use these skills independently while remaining engaged in reading? How do we get parents of disengaged readers more on board?

The HWDSB, under the direction of Dr. Chris Spence, Director, is investing money, time, and energy to engage boys. Along with authoring books, articles, and papers on the pedagogy of engagement with at-risk or disengaged students, he is coordinating grades 3 and 6 Boys’ Reading Clubs, hosting Boys’ Read celebrations and motivational nights (boys meet famous men/teens, engage in sports, dinner), and providing literacy coaches and/or literacy improvement teachers for all clusters. He has also built a library of “boy materials” for board-wide lending.

We will continue to offer literacy clubs with hands-on activities next year and some of the workshop models will move into classrooms as lessons in literacy.

We will continue to assess the attitudes and interests of both genders. How can we ensure gender equity? Our at-risk girls have not moved as successfully as our at-risk boys. How do we improve within current budget constraints? Where do we find personnel in addition to the personnel needed for the boys’ clubs? These actions will continue next year.

**Parent/Guardian Quote:**

“I love that my son is continuing WormWatch at home. He is collecting, researching, and inputting the data all by himself. Our whole family is learning about our local environment and climate change through discussions he leads. It is so fascinating to see him interested and taking the initiative.” — Bellmoore Parent
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

When discussing school-wide initiatives, we often relied on standardized test data. When discussing classroom-based initiatives, we relied on formative and summative classroom assessments; that is, criterion-referenced data — in addition to standardized test data. We administered interest and attitude surveys in most classrooms and to literacy club participants. Teachers preferred sharing the findings orally versus in a written report/checklist with options to comment.

The standardized data included DRA (Diagnostic Reading Assessment) and EQAO scores for grades 3 and 6. We referenced DRA data more often than the other forms of assessment because DRA related to every student in the school whereas EQAO data related to only grades 3 and 6 learners. We shared DRA data through the use of memos, First Class, and through a data sharing board established in a key staffing area (above the photocopiers). We analyzed EQAO results by divisions and across divisions. We established next steps for all teachers to support greater achievement next time. This was effective in establishing goals and maintaining a common language for learners and parents.

Classroom assessments included summative literacy project initiatives outlined by a rubric or rating scale, exit cards to demonstrate levels of key learning, checklists, conferences, tasks, activities, and tests. Teacher discussions and collaborative planning occurred during division meetings, PLC days, after school, and during common nutrition breaks. We kept division meeting reports in a binder that could be accessed by any staff member. Bellmoore’s PLC committee was diligent in sharing research-based, “best practice” initiatives. So, in essence, we were using qualitative and quantitative data from other inquiry projects and incorporating these researched-based strategies and initiatives into our own practices (i.e., Ardith Davis Cole’s research on gist answers).

The process of assessment is comprehensive so Bellmoore staff utilized a multi-perspective approach. We analyzed quantitative data/information from the learner, each other, our community, and other research works as needed for our SMART goals. We worked with the data as it became available, such as data from DRA, EQAO, and report cards. Standardized quantitative data clearly showed strengths and challenges.

Qualitative data played an equally important role and guided us in phrasing our evolving inquiry questions and substantiating our quantitative data. Qualitative data was more readily available on a daily (if needed) basis and it was readily shared in hallway conversations or around the photocopier. The qualitative data was the seed of our project.

The staff as a whole advocated that Bellmoore didn’t have the “right resources” for boys, thus the inception of the grassroots project and the push for reviewing quantitative data to further analyze the details.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

The results indicate favourable growth for boys according to DRA, EQAO, and report cards. However, girls continue to outperform boys by a small margin, despite having the “right stuff” and incorporating “best-practices”. On the flip side, we closed the gap. To increase engagement in reading, to develop stronger comprehension practices and extend richer responses from boys, we need to provide the “right resources”, implement the “best practices” and use data-driven goals.

EQAO Scores
EQAO scores showed a marked improvement in boys’ scores in reading and writing. Considering the percentage of boys at Levels 3 and 4:

- Grade 3 boys improved in reading from 40% to a high of 90% over the three years and, for writing, they improved from a low of 38% to a high of 70%.
- Grade 6 boys improved in reading from a low of 44% to 92% over the three years and, for writing, they improved very significantly from a low of 12% to a high of 69%.
- In reading, the grade 3 gender gap reversed to the boys being 3% higher than girls.
- In reading, the grade 6 gender gap reversed to the boys being 12% higher than girls. We certainly did not expect this.

DRA Data
The DRA data supports improvement in boys’ achievement by spring 2008.

- Grade 3 girls read slightly better than boys with the lowest differential in 2006. In the fall of 2006, on average, boys performed at Level 33 and girls at Level 35. In the spring 2007, the gap was seven levels in favor of the girls and in the fall of 2007, the gap widened to nine levels. In spring of 2008, the gap was reduced to four levels. It is interesting to note that when comparing spring 2007 to spring 2008, boys increased from Level 34 to Level 35, while girls dropped from Level 41 to Level 39. In 2007-08, we started primary literacy clubs.
- Grade 6 scores for males and females for 2006 through 2008 were quite similar. The greatest gender gap was in spring 2008 (females score=100, males score=94). Possible factors for the larger gap may be that there were seven out of 25 males on IEP’s for reading and that class sizes were slightly larger than the other years.

Report Card Marks
Class results from report cards for term 2 in all strands of English indicates males were slightly behind females by 1% to 4% for grade 1 through grade 8 at Bellmoore P.S. The gap continues to close.

Anecdotal Data
- 100% of our staff believes the bookroom has greatly assisted in engaging boys in reading.
- The use of the bookroom continues to increase as teachers become more familiar with the materials.
- 95% of the boys involved in the book clubs enjoyed the social aspects of small-group learning and the hands-on activities. Boys in the clubs generally viewed themselves as non-readers or low-level readers and these students perceived reading as only “reading books” prior to working in the clubs. Nearly all the boys said they loved the hands-on activities.
- Each year, approximately 3-5 identified at-risk/disengaged male readers chose not to participate in boys’ literacy clubs, despite tailoring the clubs to students’ interests.
- Teachers feel some students do not take DRA seriously, thus skewing the results. Intermediate teachers expressed a greater concern in this area and are researching alternative reading assessments.
- Teachers usually preferred to identify male students for whom they would customize goals and strategies, rather than identifying general goals such as “to move 8% of male learners from a Level 2 to Level 3 in reading”. The teachers felt that they keyed in on their subjects and targeted their needs more specifically.
- In all classes, when male students were engaged in the content area, they participated more actively and provided richer reading responses.
- Anticipation guides and rich discussions led to richer, more critical student responses in literacy.
- Many male learners detested learning how to give gist answer. Most learners understood the value in learning how to record responses accurately and with evidence.
- Reluctant boy readers prefer non-fiction, fantasy, sci-fi, anime, highly graphic books, magazines, newspapers, and cards.
- Early male readers progressed through DRA levels faster with at-home support reading programs (e.g., A-Z Program and Story Bits Program) than did those who lacked this reinforcement.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

EQAO Results 2003-04 to 2006-07

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 3: By Gender</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Grade 6: By Gender</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male (%)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male (%)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>65%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>73%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>61%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>92%</td>
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Overall Class Progress Report for English – 2007-08

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean for Both Genders (%)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3</td>
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<td>Grade 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DRA Results Indicating Progress from Fall 2006 to Spring 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 4</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 4</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Mean</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
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<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Score 90</td>
<td>Score 94.5</td>
<td>Score 91</td>
<td>Score 94</td>
<td>Score 90.5</td>
<td>Score 95.5</td>
<td>Score 89</td>
<td>Score 100</td>
<td>Score 95.5</td>
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</table>

DRA Results Indicating Engagement Levels from Fall 2006 to Spring 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 4</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>5.4</th>
<th>5.7</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>5.4</th>
<th>6.3</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall Synopsis of Literacy Club Engagement Data, 2006-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading became a favorite activity</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(+) 270%</td>
<td>-75%</td>
<td>-90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a good reader</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(+) 450%</td>
<td>-20%</td>
<td>-80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

Year One  The project germinated from the team who wrote the proposal. This team disseminated the latest understanding of boys’ literacy and shared the latest findings, readings, and resources at staff meetings and during professional learning community days. The staff rallied behind the goals of the original essential question: “Will the right resources engage boys and consequently improve comprehension and learning scores?” They collaborated in purchasing and collating resources to decrease the gender gap. By mid-year, the project belonged to everyone. A synergy developed and people began to re-evaluate their programs to become more comprehensive in their approach to literacy. Staff began to offer junior and intermediate literacy clubs. The whole school staff and parents participated in a “Boys Read to Succeed Kickoff Night”.

Year Two  We continued to evolve our practices and further engage males. One teacher led a model DI classroom and PLC days were devoted to DI strategies. The Board offered a vast array of workshops on comprehensive literacy techniques and the school expanded their professional development library. The school purchased the Nelson Literacy series for Grade 4. All staff felt they were on a learning curve that was properly supported and allowed for multiple entry points. At meetings, we focused on sharing data and a data sharing board was created in a focal area for staff only. More “literacy clubs” were offered this year than last year by the same teachers as last year. Achievement scores rose.

Year Three  This year was similar to year two. Teachers invested large amounts of time and energy in creating more sophisticated literacy programs and keying in on specific, measurable, attainable, and realistic goals within divisions. Conversations cycled from effective literacy and engagement strategies to key assessment pieces that, in turn, guided and modified our next teaching or learning steps. PLC days supported the development of SMART goals. Literacy clubs expanded to all three divisions. We purchased two SMART Boards and hired two male teachers for primary grades. We felt that boys’ literacy acquisition needed to be specifically addressed and, overall, the boys’ literacy project has been fundamentally adopted, not just adapted, by all.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:

For professional development:

Team Member Quote:
“The intensity of engagement in literacy activities is the strongest predictor of literacy acquisition for male learners.”
—Teacher

Administrator Quote:
“We are very encouraged by the results gathered over the last three years. We have seen the gender gap decrease. We have also seen an increase in student engagement. These findings have reinforced the need for teachers to differentiate their instruction to meet the distinct needs of our male readers. By giving boys access to “the right stuff”, engaging materials, in formats they like, along with hands-on, practical activities, we achieved the desirable results. We can only build on these successes as we work towards success for all, on a more level playing field.” — Principal

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
literacy workshops; differentiate; engagement; comprehension; bookroom
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Toronto Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Bishop Allen Academy – Grade 12 college (ETS 4C1)

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
2005-2006
Don Walker
Mark Tuohy
Tom Sbrocchi

2006-2007
Mark Tuohy
Tom Sbrocchi

2007-2008
Tom Sbrocchi
Luke Wilson
Dina Mastrofrancesco

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
Essential Question: What is the relationship between engagement and performance for “at risk” students in grade 12 assuming that higher levels of engagement should lead to fewer lates and absences and therefore higher rates of assignment submission and achievement?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

We learned that providing students with a wide variety of reading choices specific to sports in literature engaged them more in reading. First, we found that it was important to provide students with an extensive, traditional library of books related to sports in literature. Second, we found that it was important to provide students with open access to computers so they could read daily reports from mainstream sports forums such as Yahoo.com or NHL.com. Students responded well to having a reading stimulus that immediately related to their viewing from the previous night.

Because students had been immersed in multi-tasking environments, they responded more favorably to this forum. For example, the class viewed a live streaming video of Roger Clemens’ Supreme Court hearing about a steroid controversy. This led to a class discussion with everyone engaged and provided students with opportunities to express interests and opinions about the events. In the week that followed, all students were reading profiles and articles about other athletes embroiled in similar controversies about ethics in sports.

By providing students with reading choices in a traditional library, along with access to current events online, students demonstrated more interest and success in reading and better comprehension skills.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?
This course was made available to grade 12 students under the course heading “Studies in Literature “ with a focus on sports in literature. Therefore, our assessment practices were specific to this group of students nearing graduation. Our intent was to ensure that students would be able to hone their reading, writing, and comprehension skills through a forum that would be of interest to them. This was the key in our attempt to attract students to the course.

We have used a variety of instructional and assessment practices over the three years of this project such as:

Journals
Short writing assignments
Movie reviews
Essays
Independent study projects
Brief sporting event reports
Newspaper sports column writing
Sports related poetry writing

Student Quote:
“I like writing because it gives me a way to express myself and my feelings. I like writing stories because then I can make unexpected things happen, or put my own twist in – my ideas, my writing, my story. I can be as creative as I want.”
**WHAT IS OUR STORY?**

Our school, Bishop Allen Academy, is predominately an academic level school. In 2005, there were few choices for students at the workplace/college level to earn an additional English credit. The prospect of offering a course focused on the theme of sports in literature was exciting, especially the opportunity to offer it to our “at risk” students who were in need of additional support. We would have liked to take such a course when we were in high school! The opportunity to discuss sports in a formal classroom setting and earn a high school credit is very appealing to students. Through this forum, we could focus on teaching skills necessary for future success in addition to keeping students interested and engaged. When we received the funding from the Ministry of Education, we were excited about the opportunity to build a library specific to this course. We also knew that it would be necessary for students to work in a computer lab so they could have access to current topics in sports and be able to complete their assignments in a polished format.

Promoting the course was a challenge and our enrollment was not as high as we would have liked. However, in our third year of the project, we have been able to spread the word about the course more effectively through student interaction and through visits and short presentations about the course to grade 11 English classes. This has created a buzz about the course and we will continue to forge ahead.

One aspect of the course that is attractive to future students, as well as current students, is the format of the daily class routines. Students are engaged in several different ways. The 76 minute periods are structured to provide students with an interactive and diverse environment for learning. Rather than having students focus on one task during a 76 minute class, students are asked to actively participate in several tasks. A typical class involves a combination of some of the following:

- Internet browsing and reading
- Researching for independent study projects
- Group article reading and discussion
- Topic debating
- Online video and event reviewing
- Movie/documentary reviewing
- Independent work time reserved for student centered interests and incomplete work.

A combination of these activities allows students to stay active and engaged. Students were rarely bored with class assignments and completed work more thoroughly and frequently.

**WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?**

After three years, we have determined some ways to improve. For example, in order to improve attendance, we have learned that it is more beneficial to offer this course during period 2 rather than period 1. We have also learned to ensure that, with the support of our guidance department, students are aware of this course and consider it as an option.

Building this course continues to be a focus for our school and we have been carefully managing the budget provided to us by the Ministry Of Education to sustain our resources for many years to come. In addition, we currently have a teacher who is committed to working with these students, is very sports orientated, a member of the Student Success Team, a member of the reading and assessment diagnostic team, and the literacy representative for the school.

Furthermore, we continue to seek networks with Toronto sports franchises such as the Toronto Argonauts Football Club, The Toronto Maple Leafs Club, and the Toronto Raptors Club to create liaisons for students and foster the importance of literacy.

**Parent/Guardian Quote:**

“I am very glad my son is in this class, he seems to be reading about a wider variety of sports because of it.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Our data is based on three grade 12 classes to which we offered this course. Because we were working with groups of students who left after taking this course, our results are not based on tracking the same students over a three year cycle. Rather, our results are based on students while they are in grade 12. To answer our essential question we focussed on whether students in grade 12 have more consistent attendance, a higher rate of assignment submission, and a higher rate of passing the course when they are actively engaged.

We collected qualitative and quantitative data.

**Reading and Writing Surveys (Diagnostic, Formative, and Summative)**
Throughout the course, we conducted surveys to determine students’ interest in reading and writing, what activities would engage them in reading, and what topics would be of interest to them. The surveys included a self-evaluation which required the students to think about their strengths and weaknesses and their own learning abilities. Also, these surveys were a good tool for collecting information for our future planning and curriculum development. Questions included:

- What do you think is the strongest part of your writing?
- What is the weakest part of your writing?
- How do you think you can improve?
- What is your favourite sport?

**Brief Diagnostic Writing Task**
In keeping with the reading and diagnostic assessment (RAD) initiative in our board for grade 9 students, the grade 12 students in our project also completed several diagnostic reading and writing tests. For example, students read an article from *The Toronto Star* about internal loyalties between players on sport teams. We asked the students to answer several questions to assess knowledge, inquiry, communication, and application. This required comparisons of issues, case studies, hypothetical situations, comprehension checks, and personal connections. Sample writing prompts included:

- State the thesis of this article in your own words, as you understand it.
- Is there a similar code in high school sports?
- If you were in the same situation as the athletes in this article, how would you react?

**Journals**
Journals provide students with the opportunity for constant writing and engagement with course material. For this course, students are required to produce at least ten journals per month, or a total of 40 journals, and they may choose to express their opinions on anything related to sports. The purpose is to allow students to write freely and practice the writing process. We discovered — through the student surveys — that journals were the most appealing form of writing. Of all the writing assignments required, the journals were submitted with the most consistency and with the most enjoyment.
**FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?**

The following findings are based on 13 students who were enrolled in our ETS 4CI course in 2007-08.

**Views on Reading**
Students were asked the questions: “What are your views on reading?” “Do you enjoy it?” “Why or why not?” The results indicated five positive responses and eight negative responses. The students who did not enjoy reading specified that they didn’t mind reading materials if they could choose the materials themselves. Students had the highest objection to reading school-required materials. This reinforces the concept that we need to provide more choice for our students with respect to reading materials and topics of study and we need to provide active class periods.

Students were also asked: “Do you use any reading strategies to help you understand what you read?” The responses revealed that students lacked knowledge about reading strategies. Of the 13 students surveyed, three cited re-reading and four cited visualizing as a reading strategy they used. Other responses indicated that students were unaware of reading strategies and/or did not use any. This information is similar to results for our grade 9 students, which revealed that students need more support in understanding reading strategies and are unfamiliar with how the use of reading strategies can support their learning. Through ETS 4C1 and sports-related readings, our future goal is to reinforce reading strategies for our grade 12 students.

**Views on Writing**
Students were asked the questions: “Do you like writing?” “Why or why not?” There were three positive responses and ten negative responses. Students’ responses to writing were more negative than their responses to reading. The students who responded negatively stated that writing was boring and they rarely wrote when not at school. Most cited online social networking forums such as MSN messenger and Facebook as the most common place they wrote outside of school. Although this extracurricular writing is positive, much of the language used in these forums is slang or improper. Use of acronyms or phonetically created words such as “lol”, “brb”, “u” and “b4” begin to creep into their class writing. Students need to be reminded of the difference between formal and informal writing and writing for different purposes.

Most of these grade 12 students were writing resumes related to post secondary experiences; however, this was their only experience with writing that wasn’t school related in the traditional sense. When asked about the weakest and strongest parts of their writing, students frequently mentioned that their weakness was in failing to express themselves fully or in getting their point across. This also reinforces our purpose for using journals for self expression and for providing a forum for debating.

**Preferred Reading Materials**
We asked students what materials they were reading most often when not in school to gain insight into what materials to incorporate into our course. Of the 13 students surveyed in 2007-08, seven listed websites as their most frequent reading materials. Magazines were listed by four students, while books and newspapers were listed by only one student.

Students claimed that webpages were “easiest to interact with” as many webpages could be visited over a short period of time and without much effort. Students also enjoy the “refreshing” possibilities of Internet topics as webpages can be edited and refreshed everyday (sometimes every couple of seconds). Finally, students said they were comfortable with the computer platform and found this type of reading the best. Students claimed that newspapers appealed more to adults and that books were related to school assignments. With respect to paper materials, students said magazines were the most pleasing because they discussed current topics of interest to them.

These results give us information for future directions for our course. We believe that when students have greater access to computers, they will be more engaged and interested and be more likely to submit their assignments. In addition, magazine subscriptions such as *Sports Illustrated* will help keep students engaged with current paper resources and provide them with the opportunity to explore topics of interest. Using a combination of Internet and paper resources chosen by the students, we have created a dynamic and engaging course, which seeks to encourage further reading and writing activities outside of school.
**FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)**

**2005-06 Attendance, Submission Rates, and Passing Rate**
In 2005-06, we offered the course during period 1. Several students were often late and there was a high percentage of students absent. However, assignment submission rates were close to 97 per cent. Therefore, despite the lates and absences, submissions rates were solid. Of the 28 students who were enrolled in the course in 2005-06, 22 (78%) passed. When students were polled as to why they were often late or absent, the most frequent response was attributed to “sleeping in”. Consequently, we decided to move the course to period 2 for the following year.

**2006-07 Attendance, Submission Rates, and Passing Rate**
In 2006-07, we moved the course from period 1 to period 2 with a view to reducing the number of lates and absences. The rates of student lates and absences did improve dramatically and the assignment submission rate stayed strong at 94 per cent. Of the 18 students enrolled in the course in 2006-07, 13 students (72%) passed. The unsuccessful students had very low averages, which we attributed to their low attendance. We discussed the students’ attendance records on a case-by-case basis with guidance counselors and concluded that the absences were attributed to other personal and/or extenuating factors other than the course.

**2007-08 Attendance, Submission Rates, and Passing Rate**
Attendance rates were lower in the third year of the project. One reason for this may be that the course was scheduled during period 3 A/B, which was in the middle of the day and during lunch period for some of the school population. Sometimes students would begin to eat lunch before this class and arrive late. However, assignment submission rates continued to be strong in 2007-08 and we believe this is attributed to the students’ high interest in the course content. Of the 13 students enrolled in the course in 2007-08, we expect that all 13 (100%) will be successful this year. This is very encouraging for us, and represents the highest student success rate we have experienced to date.

Although this was a boys’ literacy course, there were four female students in the class who enjoyed the course and were in attendance more frequently than the majority of the males. This is consistent with female attendance in our school. Attendance was an important factor for us in this course because six or seven students had poor attendance and interrupted the cohesiveness of the course materials.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

This inquiry project provided us with the opportunity to work together on a new project with funds provided by the ministry. It gave us the autonomy to provide students with what we believed would be a relevant and exciting learning experience.

We worked collaboratively on several occasions to formalize our proposal and to communicate about our plan with our school board, administrators, guidance counselors, teachers, students, and parents. As experienced teachers, we found this collaboration refreshing as it gave us an opportunity to develop a new course specific to boys' literacy and students “at risk”. The collaboration was also valuable for new teachers as they learned from experienced teachers and were able to ask many questions with respect to best practices.

Furthermore, our hands-on experiences with ministry documents such as *Me Read? No Way!* and *Growing Success* has helped us better understand student success, literacy concepts, and “assessment for learning”. The use of these resources has helped us to execute our curriculum to the benefit of our students.

Our team functioned professionally and responsibly and made decisions based on the needs of our students. We built a culture of responsibility in which our students could be successful.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- Computer and Internet access — hands-on approach
- Magazine subscriptions such as *Sports Illustrated*
- Sports-related field trips
- Extensive library of literature specific to sports

For professional development:
- Attend Student Success workshops
- Attend school board literacy meetings
- Review updates to Ministry of Education Curriculum

Team Member Quote:
"I wish that I could have taken a course like this when I was in high school. The opportunity to be able to discuss sports in a classroom and earn a credit for it is very appealing to me."

Administrator Quote:
"We are grateful for the opportunity to provide such an enriching experience for our students. The Sports Literature Course has created an experience conducive to the development of literacy skills that are essential to both personal development and future success."

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
- engagement
- attendance
- submissions
- journals
- interactivity
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Wellington Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Bishop Macdonell Catholic High School – Grades 9, 10, and 11

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Amanda Belluz
Vince Campolongo
Tracey Curtis
Amberlea Daigneau
Elizabeth Farrell
Heather Graham
Rosemary McNamara
Maria Prigione
Derek Smydo
Jeff Warner
Essential Question: Does empowering male students by allowing them to choose classroom resources and use them on a daily basis improve comprehension skills and attitudes toward English courses over a three-year period?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

General Comments

• Boys like English courses, but need extra encouragement and motivation to succeed.

• The use of a more diversified selection of reading materials and greater flexibility in using classroom resources encourages and motivates boys.

• Boys enjoy a wide range of reading materials and adjusting to their needs has an impact on their success.

• Boys enjoy having attention devoted to their needs, which includes purchasing their special requests.

• Our teachers demonstrated a high degree of flexibility in adapting their approaches to meet the needs of the project.

Overall Conclusion

• Using a reading cart in class on a daily basis has improved boys’ reading comprehension scores.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

The GRADE Comprehension Test was used as a diagnostic assessment to inform instruction. We identified specific comprehension skills related to vocabulary, sentence, passage, and listening and responded to target students’ needs.

Student Quote:
“I do like reading at the beginning of class because there is a large range of genres in books, so it can please basically everyone. I believe it is helping my reading skills because I do not read much unless the book is really good and there are some good books that we can choose from. I hope we continue doing this.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

• Our overall plan was to determine the reading interests of all boys at Bishop Macdonell. We wanted this information to provide them with high interest reading materials for a silent, uninterrupted 20-minute reading block for a minimum of four times per week in their English classes.

• We wanted to determine if this strategy would improve boys’ comprehension skills and their attitudes towards English as a subject.

• One of our major highlights was the determination that boys, as a group, enjoyed English class.

• One of our biggest challenges was to keep the material current and relevant over a two-year period. To overcome this obstacle, we increased the number of reading carts from three to nine and rotated the carts among classes.

• All carts were colour-coded so that teachers could quickly identify cross-curricular related material.

• We created new independent summative evaluations to support boys; for example, a study unit based on an autobiography and the use of games to support literacy.

• For the first time since implementation, the boys at Bishop Macdonell C.H.S. were more successful than the girls on the OSSLT (as determined by the 2008 results for fully-participating, first-time eligible students).

“I believe all my students, not just the boys, found the reading carts to be a valuable tool in the classroom. The students appreciated the opportunity to choose what to read since this is not an experience they often have. Many of our students are busy with jobs and extra-curricular activities and they will not take the time to read for pleasure, if we do not build it

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

• We will continue to implement the reading cart strategy.

• This project has expanded to other schools. Two elementary schools – Holy Trinity C. S. and Sacred Heart C. S. – have adopted the reading cart strategy and have expanded the project to include girls.

• To support further growth in reading comprehension skills and purposeful use of literacy strategies from the Think Literacy resource, our district is participating in the Ministry Literacy GAINS initiative.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“I tend to read short, informational pieces rather than novels. This has not changed since I have been a young boy. Therefore, the use of a reading cart, with shorter things to read seems like a logical motivator for boys in high school. I am glad that my son has had the opportunity to choose a wider variety of books to read.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

The evidence we gathered included the following:

- Grade A Comprehension Tests (Level M-Form A for grade 9 students, Level H-Form A for grade 10 students, and Level H-Form B for the grade 11 students) from a commercial product called GRADE (Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation) for both middle school and high school.

- OSSLT results over a two-year period.

- Reading preference surveys for all grades 9-12 boys. Grade 9 students were re-surveyed and the results were similar. This information was used to prepare the book carts with appropriate materials.

- Reading attitude surveys were administered at the beginning and at the end of each semester.

- Students used reading logs to track reading interests.

- Letters were sent home to parents asking for feedback about the book cart strategy.

- Anecdotal feedback (written notes) was used to further adjust the content in the carts according to interests.

- Quotations were collected from students concerning the effectiveness of the book carts.

“Raising student achievement and closing the gap have always been two main priorities for the focus of our school improvement. At Bishop Macdonell C.H.S., the achievement of the boys on the OSSLT has always been lower than that of the girls. This was our prime motivation for participating in the Boys’ Literacy Inquiry Project. At the beginning of this project, in March of 2006, the percentage of successful, first-time eligible fully participating boys was 7% lower than that for the girls. This gap closed to 3% in March of 2007, but the girls were still more successful. I was very pleased to see that in March of 2008, the percentage of successful, first-time eligible, fully participating boys was 3% higher than that for the girls. This is a tribute to the work done in this project.” – Principal
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

- Results indicated a significant improvement for the group of students who used the reading carts. There was a 6% higher total test stanine average scores for the grade 10 group that used the reading cart for two years than for the grade 10 group that never used the reading cart (5.98 vs. 5.65).
  - 9% higher in Comprehension
  - 7% higher in Passage Comprehension
  - 8% higher in Sentence Comprehension
  - 5% higher in Vocabulary

- There was consistency in the results in the English program. For the grade 9 group tested in 2006-07 and the grade 9 group tested in 2007-08, there was no significant difference in average scores for all elements tested.

- Differences in test questions for different grades distorts the results. Inconsistencies were noted in average stanine scores when comparisons were made between grades 9 and 10 and between grades 10 and 11. For example, results for one grade would show a higher average in Passage Comprehension and a lower average in Sentence Comprehension when compared with results for another grade.

- For all groups, the total test score curves skew to the right of the stanine curves, indicating above average performance.

- Changes in frequency of reading from the start of a semester to the end cannot be attributed to reading cart activities.

- The reasons for reading were somewhat consistent for students in all grades whether they used the reading cart or not; that is, 35% to 45% of reading was for entertainment and 20% to 25% was for information. Similarly, the students’ attitudes towards reading were somewhat consistent for students in all grades, whether they used the reading cart or not – about 50% read for interest, while only about 10% read for fun. (These results are an interesting contradiction with the results for reasons for reading.) Perhaps boys still associate reading with school work.

- Attitudes towards English classes were consistent for students in all grades whether they used the reading cart or not, with the exception of Group A2, which showed a significant improvement in their attitudes towards English class by the end of the semester.

- The boys rated their abilities compared to peers higher at the end of each semester than at the beginning. There were no significant differences between groups that used the reading cart and those that did not, but as the students moved to higher grades, their self assessments showed smaller increases over the semester.

- The OSSLT success rate difference between first-time eligible, fully participating boys and first-time eligible, fully participating girls changed from -7% to -3% to +3% in the period from March 2006 to March 2008.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

- We formed an effective Professional Learning Community with a defined focus related to improving student achievement. As a result, teacher investigation and collaboration led to improved teacher learning about boys’ literacy, which contributed to improved student achievement.
- This project has increased our awareness that the strategy itself is not specific to one approach and crosses a variety of teaching styles and preferences.
- An outcome of our PLC has been consistency in the implementation of literacy instructional strategies, especially in the monitoring of the effectiveness of strategies.
- The standardized comprehension test, used as a diagnostic tool, supported a differentiated approach to classroom instruction as it stimulated reflection and encouraged implementation of approaches tailored to student needs.
- This project was a key motivator for teachers getting involved in another ministry literacy project called GAINS, which matches strategies to student needs to further support the development of students’ comprehension skills.
- The success of this project has stimulated the involvement of educators in our elementary schools and has led to the involvement of our science department head in a ministry sponsored differentiated instruction project focussed on addressing lower achievement for boys in grade 10 science.
- The comprehension test is being used by the school student success team.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
The resources outlined in *My Read? No Way!* corresponded well to what the boys selected in the surveys that were used to stock the reading carts.

For professional development:
Action research and teacher inquiry is extremely effective in motivating teachers to work towards improving student achievement.

Team Member Quote:
“I was pleasantly surprised to see a marked improvement in the desire to read among the boys in my class when they were exposed to a greater variety of reading materials.”

Administrator Quote:
(See quotation on page 4.)

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
boys’ reading cart; attitudes, comprehension; OSSLT results; flexibility
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Waterloo Region District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
- Cameron Heights Collegiate Institute: Grade 9 Applied English, Grade 12 Literacy course, Grades 9/10 Learning Strategies course
- Southwood Secondary School: Grade 9 Applied English, Grade 12 Writer’s Craft course
- Huron Heights Secondary School: Grade 10 Applied English

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
- Brenda Davis-Loker, CHCI: Lead, 2005-2008
- Cheryl Martin, CHCI: Support, 2007-2008
- Nicole Mitani, CHCI: Support, 2007-2008
- Andrew Macallum, CHCI: Support, 2007-2008
- Deb Tyrell, CHCI: Support, 2007-2008
- Ardithe Easton, SSS: Lead, 2005-2008
- Patrick Zettel, SSS: Support, 2005-2008
- Tim Tonner, SSS: Support 2007-2008
- Callie Sockett, HHSS: Lead, 2007-2008
- Marybeth Snyder, HHSS: Support, 2007-2008
- Mark Hunniford, HHSS: Support, 2007-2008
**Essential Question:** If boys are given opportunities to choose their own reading materials from traditional and non-traditional text based sources, will that encourage them to engage in and complete assignments? Will their attitudes towards their own abilities to communicate change? Will the quality of their work improve?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Utilize independent reading units/activities more often in classes that have reluctant (boy) readers. Boys see themselves as better readers than writers.

- Allow boys to express themselves orally more frequently during classroom activities and assessment activities. Boys recognize their difficulties with expressing themselves through writing.

- Incorporate activities and assessments that allow boys to demonstrate their reading comprehension/opinions more readily through oral expression.

- Allow boys choice in selection of reading materials. Boys prefer reading materials that are short and non-fiction.

- Allow for sustained time dedicated to independent reading so that boys have a chance to internalize their ideas. Boys need a chance to “find their voices” about what they have read. This strategy may result in better writing!

- Talk with boys when deciding on reading selections, make suggestions based on their interests. Boys perform better when they perceive that their teachers care.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

- We learned that we must incorporate more opportunities for oral communication that allows students to demonstrate understanding of material and express opinions. Therefore:
  a) We must explore the possibility of additional EA support and of scheduling classes where there is access to technology supports.
  b) We must adapt our assessment and evaluation practices to reflect this finding (e.g., allowing verbal replies during tests/quizzes).
  c) We must give boys a chance to “talk through” ideas multiple times and over a longer period of time.

- We learned that we must begin to differentiate both materials and learning activities. That is:
  a) We must offer choice in reading materials and not worry that every student is necessarily reading the “same thing” in terms of length, content, and genre.
  b) We must offer choice in ways for students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding.

- We learned that we need to articulate to students that we care about them, their interests, and their abilities.

**Student Quote:**

“I got to choose what I wanted to do the project on, and therefore was happier doing something I wanted.”

“I think the WRITING portion was boring like all the other writing activities that we did this year. I did like the reading activities a lot more though, because we picked the book based on our own criteria.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

We began as a two-school project. Our original plan was to use mentor teachers to demonstrate that a caring teacher makes a difference. By the time the funds came through in Year 1, the teachers who had earlier committed were no longer available. At this point, we focused on creating and testing a literacy attitude survey. We also purchased some resources and field-tested them with grade 9 and 10 Applied level English classes to determine the interests of boys.

In Year 2, the project went in a different direction at each of the schools, based on the unique nature of each researcher’s situation.

Project A: At one of the schools, the teacher took on a peer-mentorship initiative with the grade 12 Writer’s Craft class. Grade 9 students were matched with grade 12 partners who encouraged and coached them in their reading and writing activities during a novel study. Powerful connections were made between students and their mentors that lasted beyond the duration of the project.

Project B: In the second semester, students participated in a unit based on non-fiction stories of survival because information from the first year of the project indicated that boys were more interested in shorter pieces of non-fiction. The unit culminating activity, a videotaped interview in which the boys took on the role of a survivor they had researched, demonstrated that boys do well in oral communication of their knowledge and understandings.

Project C: In the second school, the researcher worked with boys whose area of interest was video-gaming to investigate whether or not the boys would be more engaged in reading and writing activities when they had chosen the topic and the materials. The boys valued the aspect of choice and demonstrated better reading, writing, and speaking skills.

By Year 3, we had a better understanding of what would engage boys and some ways to assess this. We opened the project up to more teachers and one more school. We chose to investigate the impact of choice on boys’ work within the framework of the theme of survival. All six classes visited a local bookstore to choose and purchase books, and then completed a series of differentiated activities and interviews about their books. The boys’ interviews were the highlight of our three years of research. We began to develop a three-school blog and wiki about our project. However, we encountered some technical issues that prohibited us from implementing this aspect of the project.

This grant allowed us to further investigate what would work for boys. It also allowed us the freedom to collaborate with other teachers, to access new materials, and generally to think outside the box (which is where the boys are anyway)!

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

- We will investigate/request personnel and technological supports to allow one-on-one time with boys for oral assessments and discussions.
- We will set up blog/wiki formats to encourage discussion about reading among students across different schools.
- We will share our findings with other teachers.
- We will deliver a “seed kit” to each school in the board. This will include our survey, a list of book suggestions, a unit plan for the Survivor Unit (to use as presented or as a model to develop another unit), and suggestions for assessment.
- We will collaborate with teacher librarians to make the best use of resources and expertise.
- Finally, good reading experiences do not generally translate into good writing. We do believe that communicating orally and writing informally (e.g., MSN speak) may provide a bridge to better writing. This is an area for further work.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“My son enjoyed reading the novel he got from Chapters with his class. We are going back to get the next one to encourage continued reading at night.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Year 1
Data Gathered:
- Student literacy attitude surveys
- Student evaluation of resources
- Teacher anecdotal observations of student engagement with materials

Comments:
- The literacy survey identified boys’ attitudes to reading and writing fairly well, but didn’t provide depth/insight into the reasons for the attitudes.
- The qualitative data was richer than quantitative data.

Year 2
Data Gathered — Project A:
- Student literacy attitude surveys (pre-project)
- Teacher anecdotal observations of student-to-student interactions
- Teachers’ assessments of written products inside and outside of the project
- Senior students’ journals, which assessed strategies used and results of process with junior students
- Junior students’ comments on the process

Comments:
- Journals were an excellent source of data on strategies that worked with “at-risk” students.
- It was difficult to compare writing marks inside and outside the project – other factors intervened.

Data Gathered — Project B:
- Student literacy attitude surveys (pre-project)
- Teachers’ anecdotal observations of students’ performances inside and outside the project
- Teachers’ assessments of research and student interview performances

Comments:
- We needed a better assessment tool for gathering student information about what was and was not working for them.

Data Gathered — Project C:
- Student literacy attitude surveys (pre- and post-project)
- Teachers’ anecdotal observations of students’ performances inside and outside the project
- One-on-one student post-project interviews

Comments:
- Post-project data was very valuable; students were more willing to communicate their ideas orally in the interviews.

Year 3
Data Gathered:
- Student literacy attitude surveys (pre-project)
- Online student feedback on literacy project (post-project)
- Teachers’ assessments of students’ products inside and outside the project
- Teachers’ anecdotal observations of students’ performances
- Anecdotal observations from colleagues

Comments:
- The online survey was the most accessible for students; it provided good quantitative data to support our findings.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Most of our findings are based on data gathered in the third year. The structure of the final year of the project best demonstrates the evolution of findings from previous years.

Year 1 Findings
- Data confirmed that boys have different interests in reading materials than girls – higher interest in magazines, emails/MSN, non-fiction, and graphic novels (although our observations suggested that boys do not engage for long with graphic novels and the form appears too complex for “at-risk” readers).
- Preliminary results showed approximately 30% of males expressed negative attitudes towards reading and writing, with stronger negative attitudes about writing. Even so, only 5% saw reading and writing as “not important” in their lives.
- Observations confirmed that boys will remain engaged in reading for longer periods of time if the pieces are short and non-fiction.

Year 2 Findings
- All three projects undertaken in Year 2 contained a large oral component. Observations confirmed that boys are better able to develop and present their ideas when allowed to do so orally.
- It became clear that a one-on-one component was important when allowing boys to develop their ideas orally.
- Boys said that one of the critical factors in sustaining their attention was the element of choice.
- Teachers’ observations and journals from both senior and junior students all indicate the power of treating students as if they knew the answers and providing coaching to the boys on self-expression.
- Teachers and boys confirmed that boys will remain engaged for longer periods of time with materials and processes that are real-life, authentic, and short.

Year 3 Findings
- Findings from Years 1 and 2 led to the investigation of differences in boys’ abilities to express themselves orally vs. in writing, as well as the impact of choice on the sustained engagement of boys in literacy activities.
- Teachers’ assessments across three schools show that boys’ achievement is higher when given the opportunity to express their opinions orally. (see Table 1)
- Within the oral expressions of opinions, teachers observed more sophisticated patterns of thought, richness of language, and extensions of ideas.
- Interviewers observed that boys demonstrated greater spontaneity and the ability to “think on their feet” during interviews and they demonstrated higher-order thinking skills in the interviews.
- Boys demonstrated a deeper comprehension of their books orally than would be expected based on previous writing activities.
- Overwhelmingly, boys performed beyond expectation when expressing ideas orally.

(Results for Year 3 continued on next page)
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

- The comparison of results for two oral assessments indicated better performance when boys were given a larger range of choice of topics.
- The comparison of results for two oral assessments indicated better performance when boys were speaking as themselves rather than taking on the role of a real-life survivor they had researched. (see Table 2)
- Our online post-project survey indicated that boys found choice to be a significant factor in helping them sustain interest in a project; e.g., “...I liked this project because we got to choose what we wanted to do a lot of the time”, and “I got to choose what I wanted to do the project on, and therefore was happier doing something I wanted.”
- Our online survey indicated that boys most enjoyed reading the book and least enjoyed the writing activities in the workbook. (See graph) Also, 31% of boys indicated they enjoyed talking about the books “very much” and 32% enjoyed the interview “very much”.
- 36% of boys indicated that they were more willing than usual to do the work for this project; only 5% were less willing than usual to do the work for this project.
- Boys overwhelmingly indicated that they were more interested in the activities in this project than in the regular activities of the English class.
- 47% of boys indicated that they felt their work in the project was better than the work they regularly did in class: e.g., “I think I did well because I actually got to choose what I read and I liked it, so it was much easier to talk and write about.”
- Teachers observed increased motivation and attention in the reading portions of this project; however, this didn’t translate into the writing activities: e.g., “…some of the things in the project were more fun to do, which makes me more willing to do it. However, I wasn’t very motivated to do the writing stuff, because it was kinda like everything else.”
- Colleagues observed that students were reading more outside of English class: e.g., “Kids are stopping each other in the hall, reading the backs of their books to each other.”
- During the book selection process, teachers observed that students picked longer pieces of text than expected.
- Students appeared to pick books that were predominantly narrative in form.

Table 2

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Enjoyment of various parts of project

Boys' interest in activities as compared to regular English activities
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

It was exciting to have the resources to do something outside of the box! What a learning experience it has been for us as teachers and learners.

Our major highlights were two paradigm shifts: the first connected to content and the second connected to assessment.

We have learned that we need to let go of the expectation that all kids can read the same thing at the same time with the same level of interest. Instead, we need to embrace the concept of personal engagement as opposed to collective engagement. Boys need to be given more opportunities to choose their materials in order to hook them into participating and to reinforce their sense of expertise. Ultimately, this project showed us that boys respond when we care enough about them to trust their choices.

The second shift is in our assessment practices. We have learned that we have underestimated the boys’ level of understanding about their reading by using only written assessments. We will give our boys more opportunities to explore and demonstrate what they know orally. Having discovered this, our next challenge is finding the supports and structures needed to allow more oral assessment in classrooms.

From the beginning, this was an inter-school project. Coming from different departments in different schools, we were able to find common understandings about boys and literacy. We feel this project is sustainable in other settings because the major shift is in the teaching/learning process rather than the purchasing of resources. We found that working as a team made this process more manageable, more enjoyable, and more energizing. It has been wonderful to gain insight from each other! As well, having an inter-school team meant that we met away from a regular school setting and were able to get away from the everyday concerns to concentrate on this project more effectively.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Find out what interests boys to determine what to buy. The following are some suggestions:
Reading materials on sports, extreme sports, dirt-biking, skateboarding, snowboarding, cars, video games and computers
Stories of physical survival, drugs, gangs, and biographies (sports, musicians, etc.)
Surprisingly, we found little interest in graphic novels

For professional development:
Opportunities (e.g., conferences) to learn more about issues related to boys and literacy and technological developments such as blogs and wikis
Time to collaborate with colleagues and discuss ideas

Team Member Quote:
“This project has changed a lot over the past three years but, in the end, we have found that our original instincts were sound. Boys are more literate than their reading and writing results indicate and, if we use different strategies to engage them and to assess their work, the abilities that we were unable to see before will become apparent.”

Administrator Quote:
“Boys’ literacy is of particular interest to me so I was excited to interview the boys. A highlight for me involved a student whom I had seen on occasion in my office. He had purchased a book for the first time but wasn’t quite finished reading it. He insisted that he would finish the book and would lend it to me so we could talk about it. Several weeks later, the book was on my desk. Overall, I found the students’ enthusiastic, articulate, engaged with the activities and, due to the ownership of their reading choices, motivated to complete and express orally their opinions about the books.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
oral communication; choice; ability follows attitude; real-life; teacher growth
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Niagara Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Canadian Martyrs — Grades 1 and 2
St. Vincent de Paul — Grade 3
St. Mark — Grade 3
St. Nicholas — Grade 2

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Norma Ferry
Pam VanderBracken
Janet Gerden
Kendel Cappallazzo
Alison Morawek
Karyn Henderson
**Essential Question:** When “talk” precedes writing, children have the opportunity to explore, generate, and organize ideas. Talk helps students clarify and express their thinking. This leads to more disciplined thinking, which in turn leads to more focused, purposeful writing. Purposeful talk therefore needs to be explicitly taught if boys and girls are to increase the level and quality of their writing. How can teachers best facilitate purposeful talk?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

**Strategies that promote purposeful talk before writing**
- Eye-to-eye, knee-to-knee, think/pair/share.
- Visual prompts for talk such as webs, graphic organizers, mind maps, and Q-charts.
- Drama activities that explore ideas and differing points of view.
- Oral rehearsals – opportunities to practice expressing ideas clearly and effectively.
- Read-alouds that extend students’ understandings of texts (e.g., “I wonder…” and “This reminds me of…”)
- Modeled conversational skills.
- Integration of talk into all areas of the curriculum as a tool for exploring and developing ideas prior to writing.
- Writing lessons based on the 6+1 Traits of Writing.

**Strategies that promote purposeful talk during writing**
- Encourage students to “say” it before writing it, either quietly to self, into a whisper phone, or in their heads.
- Encourage students to read out loud as they write quietly to self, into a whisper phone, or in their heads.
- Have students share their work with a partner or in a small group.
- Encourage students to self-monitor by referring to visual prompts such as teacher- and student-created charts/webs.

**Strategies that promote purposeful talk after writing**
- Opportunities for students to hear and share finished pieces of work in small and large groups.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

We found that children write at a higher level when they:
- understand that they are using talk as a strategy;
- have practice using talk as a strategy; and
- understand how that strategy helps.

With this in mind and to encourage children to see talk as an essential step in the writing process, we adopted the following phrase as a “rule for writing”:

*If you can think it, you can say it.*
*If you can say it, you can write it.*

**Student Quote:**

“Thank you for teaching me all that stuff. I’m going to be a writer when I grow up.”
**WHAT IS OUR STORY?**

We began our inquiry project knowing that talk plays an important role in motivating and empowering children to write. We compared talk to math manipulatives, and described talk as the “hands-on” part of communication that leads to and promotes reflection, clarity of ideas, and more focused, higher-level writing. When we were attempting to establish and measure the importance of talk, we collected a number of writing samples based on parallel lessons about a given topic. The first lesson allowed for very little talk while the second lesson promoted talk. This data confirmed our belief that talk plays an important role in the writing process.

Our essential question shifted from, “Does talk add clarity and depth to boys writing?” to, “How can we best facilitate purposeful talk?” We wanted to understand the role teachers play in facilitating purposeful talk that extends into the writing process. We began exploring strategies to get boys talking. These included “eye-to-eye, knee-to-knee”, oral rehearsal, drama activities, and the use of whisper phones. We worked on refining our book talk, eliciting from students connections, visualizations, predictions, and wonderings. We also created webs and mind maps to provide children with visual cues to organize and clarify their thinking. Finally, we taught children that talk is a strategy for writing: “If you can think it, you can say it. If you can say it, you can write it.”

By making talk an integral part of writing and building an effective structure for talk time, we found that boys talked more and were often excited to express their ideas. Because boys had something to say, when it was time to write, everyone was writing. We noticed that, through practice and reflection, as teachers we were internalizing our own talk and becoming better at eliciting purposeful talk from our students. When we compared writing samples based on the same science topic, the writing of children in Year Three was generally better than that of children in Years One and Two.

In celebration of their writing and to provide boys with a positive male role model, we invited Brian Cretney, author of *Last in Line*, to share his experiences as a writer. (Parents were also invited.) We sent a pamphlet entitled *Talk On, Write On* home to parents to help them support the development of their children’s literacy skills.

**WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?**

How can we get children to internalize talk as a strategy for writing?

Because talk leads to higher-level, more focused writing; we will continue to promote talk as a strategy and motivator for writing. Our goal in teaching children that talk is an integral part of the writing process, and in modeling purposeful talk, is to lead children to internalize talk and, independently, use talk as a metacognitive writing strategy. We will continue to integrate talk into all areas of the curriculum as a tool for understanding, developing, and explaining ideas.

It is our belief that by engaging colleagues in formal and informal dialogue about the role of talk and its positive impact on writing, we can promote the use of talk in other classrooms and refine the use of talk in our own classrooms.

**Parent/Guardian Quote:**

“I never thought that talk was that important. I will encourage him to talk more often and make connections while we read and write.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Student Survey
We collected data about boys’ attitudes towards writing, willingness and ability to express ideas orally, and the quality of writing that results from making talk an integral part of the writing process. A student survey administered in Year One and Year Three included these questions:

- Do you like to write?
- How do you feel when it is time to write?
- Where do you get your ideas for writing?
- What makes it easier for you to write?

Student Interviews
We conducted student interviews in Year Two. Each of six team members interviewed four boys. Boys were selected based on their achievement levels in Language to allow a range and depth of responses. We transcribed and coded interviews and analyzed them for themes. The interview included the following questions:

- How do you get ready to write?
- If you were a teacher what would you do to help your students write better and enjoy writing?
- Why do we do eye-to-eye, knee-to-knee?
- Tell me about other talk in the classroom.
- Tell me about your favorite book.
- Tell me about the reading and writing that takes place at your house.

Talk Checklist
We developed a “talk checklist” (4-point Likert scale) to record our observations during student “talk time” in pairs and small groups. The checklist included six areas based on the Six Traits of Writing: Ideas, Organization, Word Choice, Voice, Sentence Fluency, and Conventions. We analyzed the observations for “Ideas” and compared the results to a specific piece of writing that was assigned based on a topic about which students were “talking.” We used an “Ideas Rubric” to score writing pieces.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Student Survey Results
Student survey results for Year One and Year Three indicate that although a considerable percentage of boys always claim to enjoy writing, this percentage drops when asked how they feel when it is time to write. This would suggest that when given sufficient prompts, support, and opportunities to dialogue with classmates, students feel comfortable engaging in the process of writing. However, if told it is time to write, with insufficient instructions and opportunities for idea development, boys feel nervous and uncomfortable. These results also suggest that students had difficulties in previous experiences with writing.

As predicted, the boys in Year Three felt happier when asked about their feelings when it is time to write, as opposed to the boys in Year One. We believe this is due in part to the opportunities we have been given as teacher researchers to refine our instructional strategies, as well as the opportunities we afforded our students in the areas of purposeful talk and writing.

Other Themes in Survey Data
• Boys will use their “schema” most frequently to assist them in retrieving ideas for writing. (Note: Students are specifically taught the concept of schema as part of reading comprehension instruction, and are therefore familiar with this term and its function in idea development.) A considerable percentage of boys also noted that family or home, media, and one’s teacher were helpful in providing ideas for writing.

• Over one-third (33%) of boys felt that word knowledge and vocabulary tools (sounding the word out, using the word wall, using a dictionary) were most helpful when engaged in writing. This speaks to the fact that students continue to show concern for spelling when writing and have difficulty understanding that there is much more to writing than conventions and mechanics.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Student Interview Results
The student interviews yielded rich data around nine predominant themes: (1) Ideas and Idea Development, (2) Spelling as a Tool for Success in Writing, (3) Student Selected Reading/Writing Topics, (4) Impressions on the Task of Writing, (5) Talking as a Springboard to Writing, (6) Requirements to Be a Successful Writer, (7) Accessing Thought and Schema, (8) The Link Between Reading and Writing, and (9) Math and Its Role in Literacy and Writing.

Of these nine themes, students commented most on the theme of “Talking as a Springboard to Writing”. Students enjoy the opportunity to engage in purposeful talk with their peers, and feel that this assists in developing and solidifying ideas for writing. Students indicated that at the beginning of the year, when eye-to-eye, knee-to-knee was introduced as a strategy to provide students with “talk time,” many felt intimidated or nervous that they would have to express themselves orally, and share their ideas with others. After becoming more familiar with opportunities for “purposeful talk,” students clearly felt more comfortable in this setting and, in fact welcomed the chance to engage in eye-to-eye, knee-to-knee and other activities involving oral communication. This is exemplified in the following student quotes:

“Eye-to-eye, knee-to-knee feels happy and exciting.”
“Eye-to-eye, knee-to-knee helps me to get good answers, and it is a good exercise for my brain.”
“I feel very happy when I do eye-to-eye, knee-to-knee, because then when I go to write, I know lots of stuff.”
“Telling my answers to other people and then writing about it is good.”

“Ideas and Idea Development” was also a key theme in the interviews. Students are aware that schema (background knowledge) is integral to idea development and writing. Therefore, schema was referenced by students quite often in the interviews. Students often made reference to the talking process, and how this assisted in creating and expanding ideas for writing. Some examples if their statements are:

“When you're talking, you're hearing all different things going all around in your head, and then you will end up with a story.”
“I share my ideas with my partners and they share with me, and it can give me more ideas.”
“I have lots of ideas and stuff that I keep in my schema, and then I write them down.”

Talk Checklist and Writing Samples Results
We collected student scores in the area of “Ideas” based on a talk checklist we developed. The “Ideas” portion of the talk checklist was broken into three areas: (1) Student remained on topic, (2) Student made relevant connections, and (3) Student elaborated and provided additional detail. We then gave students a writing topic based on an oral discussion they had with their peers (i.e., during eye-to-eye or knee-to-knee). In the graph below, the talk scores (Series 1) were compared with the writing scores (Series 2) to determine whether opportunities to engage in purposeful talk assisted in improving the level of students’ written compositions. A significant trend appeared when comparing the talk and writing scores — students performances typically dropped an entire level when shifting from oral communication to written composition. It is believed that had students not been given the opportunity to engage in purposeful talk, the boys’ writing scores would have been significantly lower.

A Comparison of Student Talk and Writing Scores

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

Highlights
- The opportunity to attend conferences where Ruth Culham, Debbie Miller, Lori Jamison, Tony Stead, and Caroline Filice shared their passions and expertise about literacy.
- The opportunity to collaborate with colleagues who share an interest in boys' literacy and the role of talk in writing.

Insights
- “Talk” needs to be explicitly taught.
- Just as talk leads to higher-level, more focused student writing, teacher discussions about the value and use of purposeful talk helped clarify and develop our understanding of the role of talk in our classrooms.
- “Talk” touches every area of the curriculum, and the teacher’s role is one of facilitator.
- Children are empowered when they experience talk integral to the writing process.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
You Read To Me, I'll Read To You by Mary Ann Hoberman
Website: www.storylineonline.net

Plays

For professional development:
A Primary Unit for Writing by Lucy Calkins
6+1 Traits of Writing by Ruth Culham
Guided Reading Basics by Lori Jamison Rog
Reading With Meaning by Debbie Miller
Is That A Fact? by Tony Stead

Team Member Quote:

Administrator Quote:

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
focussed; purposeful talk; engaging writers; Talk On, Write On; eye-to-eye, knee-to-knee
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Toronto District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Chester Public School — Grades 2, 3, and 5

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Karin Kurkcuyan
Dinah Liko
Frances Topa
Mark Bell
Agapi Zegas

teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca
This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
Essential Question:
Will participation in non-fiction literature circles improve boys’ reading skills and attitudes?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

One of the most obvious findings is that the strategy “Let them Talk” is really powerful. Both boys and girls, in particular the ones in junior classes, seemed to benefit from the opportunity to have some social interaction and talk about what they had read. Through discussion, they were able to ask some higher-level questions and clarify misunderstandings. Adding a social aspect to their reading appeared to motivate the boys to keep up with their readings and participate in class discussion. The structure of the information circles really helped to build the social skills necessary to work productively in a group, as well as building in a level of accountability. We did need to introduce the use of a talking stick to help students avoid interrupting and talking over each other.

The second most important finding is the importance of exposing students to non-fiction reading materials. In the past, the use of literature circles focused exclusively on fiction novels, which appealed only to some of our students. The non-fiction materials we chose were closely related to the various social studies and science strands. This allowed us to integrate literacy with our subject-specific programs and provide students with the opportunity to make meaningful and authentic connections in their learning.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

In the past, we did not really do any type of reading attitude or preference surveys. The DRA, which we use in the primary grades to assess reading achievement, does not really place a strong emphasis on reading attitudes. The CASI does have a reading attitude component, but it is an optional aspect of the assessment that not everyone uses. Therefore, the consistent use of a reading attitude survey allowed us to purchase books that appealed to our students and to create classroom libraries that reflected all readers’ preferences. We were also able to choose books for our read-alouds and shared reading that not only met the purposes of our instruction but also interested our students.

The structure of the information circles also helped in differentiating our instruction for students. We were able to match the students reading levels so that they were able to access books at their instructional level.

Student Quote:
“It's a fun experience because we got to talk about Ancient Civilizations. I like the roles of illustrator and wordsmith because I get to draw about my reading.” — Grade 5 student
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Our interest in information circles was sparked by our former teacher-librarian. She had heard about this reading strategy that is very much like a literature circle but uses non-fiction books. We already had a boys reading club in place, but we felt we had to address the issue of boys' literacy in individual classrooms. After consulting resources such as Me Read? No Way!, we decided that information circles would be a good area to focus our inquiry. Our essential question was designed to look at the effect on boys' attitudes towards reading and reading skills as a result of our initiative. We provided professional development on using and assessing information circles. We also had some in-class teacher coaching in the initial stages of the inquiry. As a group, we selected curriculum-related reading materials to use in our inquiry.

In the first year of the project, we did a minimum of five information circle sessions per grade. In the next one and one-half years, teachers decided how often to use this instructional approach.

Our real challenge over the three years has been the turnaround of teachers. Many of the teachers in the first year of our inquiry retired, moved on to other schools, or changed grade assignments. As a result, it has been difficult to keep the project going. In hindsight, it would have been a good idea to build in more PD days so that we could have properly informed the new teachers. Fortunately, a few of the teachers who were involved in the initial stages of the inquiry were able to share some of their experiences with the new staff and help them to use information circles in their classrooms. This was particularly true of the grade 5 team, where one of the teachers helped her colleagues integrate the information circle model seamlessly into their programs.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

We have purchased some additional non-fiction book resources with the additional funds we received this year. We are hoping to continue adding to our collection through the library. We have talked about the possibility of using shorter text from magazines and newspapers to supplement our information circles.

We are also planning to start the use of a new resource we recently came across titled Mini-Lessons for Literature Circles by Harvey Daniels. We are hoping this will enable us to continue moving forward with our use of information circles. One of the suggestions we are thinking of implementing is the use of a journal format instead of role sheets.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Initially, we had decided to use four sources of data to serve as our indicators of success; however in the second year of our data collection we decided to eliminate one of our data sources. We had intended to use library circulation data but we discovered that it was not actually a reliable source of reading attitudes. Due to the rules governing the function of the library, students with overdue or lost books were either not able to borrow any more books or were limited to one. The length of the books also posed a challenge as novels required a longer loan period and this impacted the frequency with which books were signed out by students. Instead, we decided to use grade 3 EQAO gender data as our fourth data source.

Our most consistent data came from the attitude surveys we conducted pre- and post-information circles. They indicated a steady increase in boys' overall attitudes towards reading. Although, there were a few inconsistencies or dips which might be accounted for by a particular class of students or the time of year the survey was completed. This source of data seemed the most relevant to our inquiry question as it was a direct measure of student attitudes. The level of improvement in reading skills; however, was determined using more quantitative data in the form of DRA and CASI results.

Our second source of data was report card marks in Social Studies, Science, and Language Arts for the first and last term for boys in grades 2, 3, and 5 whose classes were participating in the project. There was a marked increase in overall Language Arts report card marks from first to last term in each year of the project. The Social Studies and Science report card marks did not appear to be affected in any significant way and remained consistent in both terms.

Our third source of data was the DRA (grades 2 and 3) scores and the CASI (grade 5) scores. Overall, scores went up as expected in each academic year and there was a slight marked increase over the three years of the inquiry.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Average Grade 5 Boys' CASI Scores 2005-8

* Spring CASI results not yet available for 2008

EQAO Results for Grade 3 Boys Achieving at Levels 3 and 4, 2004-2007
Below: Grade 3 DRA levels for this spring are not yet available. We can see there has been a small increase in the % of students at DRA level 34+.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

The inquiry process was a very natural way for a team of teachers to work together. It gave us a common focus for the last few years in one aspect of our programs. We place great emphasis on the use of data in our education system these days, yet there is often a disconnect between what the data says and our instructional practice in the classroom. During this inquiry, our data was directly related to what we were doing in our classrooms with our students on a daily basis so it was very meaningful. Our students’ attitudes and reading preferences drove the information circles as we tried to find reading material that was curriculum related, close to their instructional reading levels, and that interested them.

The real challenge was the turnover in teachers. Very few of our original members remained as a part of the inquiry group. However, as mentioned earlier, a key teacher was able to bring some of the new teachers on board and continue using the information circle teaching model. Generally, we also found that the information circles tended to work more effectively with students in the higher grades. The grade 2 students, in particular, found the format challenging and needed a lot more guidance and teacher direction.

Information circles offer a lot of flexibility to both students and teachers. It allows an opportunity for a teacher to work with small groups of students while others in the class are actively engaged. Those of us who were a part of the inquiry will continue to use this strategy for years to come.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Sails series of non-fiction books at various levels
National Geographic — Windows on Literacy
National Geographic — Reading Expeditions

For professional development:
Looking into Literacy Circles by Harvey Daniels
Bridging the Gap Between Fiction and Non-Fiction in the Literature Circle Setting by Debbie Stien and Penny L. Beed
The Reading Teacher, March 2004

Team Member Quote:
“Information circles allowed me to build relationships with the class early on in the year and helped establish a framework to integrate Social Studies and Science in a meaningful manner.”

Administrator Quote:
“Information circles have allowed teachers to engage students by integrating subject areas into their literacy blocks. Through the use of this instructional strategy, students were able to see the genuine connections in their learning, while also working on their interpersonal skills.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
information circles; role sheets; non-fiction; integrating; “Let them Talk”
Final School Report: 2008
Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Toronto District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Don Mills Collegiate Institute in collaboration with Don Mills Middle School — Grades 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Jean Sonmor, Project Contact, CL Literacy, Numeracy, and Learning Resources
Laura Ponti-Sgargi, Credit Recovery teacher
Ron Gray, Student Success Co-ordinator
Cynthia Grant, former ACL English
Heather Moffat, Dance, Library and English teacher
Lucia Miron, ESL Teacher
Gina Theofilaktidis, ESL and Physical Education teacher
Vance Scott, Vice-Principal in charge of Literacy
BaKari Lindsay, Grade 6 teacher at Don Mills Middle School.
**Essential Question:** If we find ways to honour and build on boys’ out-of-school literacy, will our work have a positive spillover effect on their in-school literacy skills and their attitude to learning?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

**New definition of literacy**
During the three years of our inquiry, we learned a great deal. The expression “out-of-school” literacy faded from use and we began to use an expanded definition of literacy. Our inquiry team now talks about “multi-modal texts” or “texts” and by this we mean graphic novels, magazines, newspapers, the Internet, e-mail, graphics, videos, sound, as well as the traditional textbooks associated with “in-school” literacy.

**Human connection still powerful**
Most of our students bonded with the group and the leaders. They stayed connected to the program and considered the library a comfort zone in the school because of their participation in the project. They also improved their lexile scores and grade equivalency levels.

**Reading online is “easier”**
They preferred browsing and grazing to reading a thick book. And even if they were reading a novel they would prefer to do it on a device like Amazon Kindle. Even competent readers explained that a big book was daunting — a long, lonely, and linear experience.

**We need to update our courses**
We learned how critical out-of-school literacy is to students’ lives and we now understand that our courses of study need to embrace these skills. We saw the immense potential of graphic novels to stir subtle, complex ideas, and provoke discussion.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

**Instructional**
- We are putting less emphasis on classes reading the same novel in lockstep. It’s been a difficult transition but some teachers are actively working to make the literature circle concept standard throughout the school as well as attempting to match the literature studied to students’ roots and interests.

- Students working together using software tools or doing Internet research should at times be grouped according to prior skills, not topic choice. We believe that the decoding skills are part of the new literacy and they must be valued, taught, and assessed individually.

**Assessment**
- Concept Mapping is a valuable tool for assessing a student’s depth of understanding.

- Computerized assessment has a significant impact on learning because results are immediate and students can instantly correct their misunderstandings.

**Student Quote:**
“I was never the kind to stay after school and take part in school activities but, with Literacy Club, I did. I was helping a younger kid and telling him to read, so I figured I better do it myself. I read my books for English instead of just getting Sparks Notes like I always used to. It was good. Yes, helpful. I read some other books too.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

We began in a lather of excitement three years ago. The stage was set. Our school had new staff in positions of responsibility. Our VP, Fred Chan, had a special interest and expertise in research and assessment. And everyone wanted some of the ministry money to come to DMCI. Our OSSLT pass rate was good (84%), but our males in Applied programs were struggling and we worried that our results were not improving as rapidly as in the rest of the board. In 14 hours, we pulled together a proposal presenting the literacy hopes, dreams, and understandings of ten very different educators.

When we heard that our proposal had been accepted, we went into overdrive. Our first work plan had 15 different initiatives in it and 12 additional names. However, it wasn’t long before the excitement about getting our project funded turned into the chore of organizing. Two things were obvious: (1) team building was necessary and (2) it wouldn’t happen overnight. At year-end, we had completed seven of our projects and retained six members of our team.

The pattern was set. Over the next two years, we continued many of the original initiatives especially our Boy’s Literacy Club which met after school in a peer-tutoring arrangement with struggling readers from our sister middle school. The older boys received volunteer hours for their efforts and the middle school boys were delighted to be with the cool basketball stars from the high school. Besides tutoring, they went on a book buying excursion for the library and to two Raptors games as part of the Read to Achieve program.

This year, we focused on grade 10 boys. Our Boys’ Literacy Club has been a role modeling exercise for struggling readers, many of whom also have behavior issues. We took our cue from the TDSB’s Access Success document, which says that the single most important strategy for penetrating the anti-school “boy code” is providing appropriate male role models. The appeal of this program is very strong. We have near-perfect attendance and a coterie of uninvited others who regularly try to sneak into the presentations.

Our team continues to wax and wane but it is a team with a shared goal. Literacy is now entrenched as a school-wide focus. There are still discussions about definitions but, for all of us, “literacy” means much more than it did three years ago!

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

- We will complete data collection on the Boys’ Literacy Club after final evaluations in June 2008. (We’ll send an addendum to our report.) We need to do follow-up attitude inventories too and compare them with the pre-program results.

- Since the success of the 2006-07 peer tutoring program was so dramatically evident this year, we will reinstitute that program next year in collaboration with the Middle School.

- Our Read 180 program was tested with both ESL C and Grade 9 Applied students this year. We need to compare the results of each to make decisions about implementation in the fall of 2008.

- With the remaining money in the grant, we plan to update our graphic novel collection so it will be possible to use them in literature circles. We will also order more sports and second language magazines.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“ We are very pleased that our son is part of the Boys’ Literacy Club. He looks forward to the events and they seem to give him new ideas about the value of school related to his life. He made a commitment to the younger boy and he won’t shirk his responsibility.” – Mother of a Grade 10 reluctant reader
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

We knew data gathering would be a challenge. We didn’t have daily access to a consistent group of students because our focus was not a single class but our school’s most reluctant readers. Also, our teachers believed curriculum expectations did not allow students in any one course to be our guinea pigs.

But we were undeterred. We had quantitative data at our finger tips. We had an Accelerated Reader reading program hosted on the Internet and we were running all of our grade 9 students through it. This meant that we had reading tests that gave us a lexile level and a ZPD for each student. From this quantitative data, we picked 30 boys with the lowest scores and invited them (through letters to their parents) to join a Boys’ Literacy Club. We also used report card and OSSLT data.

The club just got started in the spring of 2006. We had approximately 48 students whom we were trying to work with on lunch hours that only overlapped for 30 minutes. Several team members were gamely giving up their lunch; however, the project was slightly chaotic. It didn’t last long enough to make measurable strides in lexile levels but the attitudes and energy levels were terrific. We learned that our boys loved the idea of helping the younger kids and getting volunteer hours for doing so. They were proud to be part of the Boys’ Literacy Club.

We had worried that the term “literacy” might carry some pejorative connotations. Not at all! The program included treats and graphic novels and rewarded the boys with volunteer hours. Their multi-modal, out-of-school literacy, was being honoured and they were delighted. Our strongest evidence of impact was the terrific attendance and enthusiasm. In the seventh session in early June we had 19 pairs of boys sign up with their e-mails to communicate over the summer about novels (graphic and otherwise), movies, games, and magazines. In the magazine, “Language Arts”, in July 2004, an article by Heather A. Blair and Kathy Sanford entitled Morphing Literacy: Boys Reshaping their School-Based Literacy Practices describes the phenomenon that we observed; that is, “Boys transform literacy events into social-cultural capital”. We saw this happening in our peer tutoring group. A cachet was developing: some of the “cool guys” were now into literacy.

But for all our success, we needed to refine the execution of our strategies. By fall 2006, we knew lunch hour would not work. We needed a teacher, not volunteers, running the program and we needed the kids’ help to design the program. We consulted both June report card marks and recent Star Reading lexile levels to decide who should be invited into the new program. We also used another tool — in-depth literacy interviews. On October 16, 2006, nine teachers — both regular staff working during their preps and a few retired teachers brought in on supply — conducted 78 fifteen-minute “Motivation to Read” interviews. We used a questionnaire published in “The Reading Teacher” in April 1996. It not only gave us probing questions, but also suggestions on how to ask the questions and when to wait for a response. We had two purposes: (1) the kids who were selected for the literacy club, through this process, would of course feel special and (2) it gave us insight into students’ motivation and their tastes in books. We were following the suggestion to “let them talk” as a means of honouring their ideas about literacy. We set enrollment for high school at 15 students. We invited grade 10 students based again on their lexile scores and grade 11 and 12 students based on slower-than-average credit accumulation. The boys met Thursdays after school in the computer lab. Students were clamouring to get in. “Social-cultural capital” was everywhere.

After the program, the older students often reconvened a few feet away in the library office where they talked words, books, sports, as well as feuds, girlfriends, and the usual teen talk. The Boys’ Literacy Club and the library after-hours activities were definitely part of the boys’ comfort zone.
**FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?**

We believe the evidence is clear that we did find ways to honour and build on boys’ “out-of-school literacy”. This report describes the program for the first two years. This year, we took a new approach with the Boys’ Literacy Club — our key strategy was the use of role models. Hurricane Carter came to the school in response to one boy’s e-mail and spoke to a grade 10 Applied English class. He mesmerized them! We used some of the grant money to buy his book for each of the 14 students in the class.

In the second semester, we set up opportunities for grade 10 boys who had scored lower than 60 on one language-based course in the first term. Of the 63 candidates, we selected every third name and generated a list of 18 boys, many of whom had problems with behaviour and all of whom were delighted to get out of class occasionally. This group listened to a series of motivational speakers — all men who are making substantial livings in the areas of communication. They were men who had been “bad boys” in various ways at school and had preserved a strong identification with the “boy code” as defined by TDSB’s Access Success! Again we were oversubscribed. A handful of other boys, when they learned from their friends that a literacy event was scheduled, would simply show up in the library and insist that there was an oversight. No one moved a muscle. They sat, apparently spellbound, while the young men finished their presentations.

*Access Success: Understanding Boys and Literacy Issues*, a 2004 TDSB document, is categorical on the value of role models and states: “Utilizing role models may be our most powerful tool in motivating boys to become lifelong readers.” We hope to demonstrate success with this strategy.

**2008 OSSLT Results**

This year, our overall pass rate for fully participating students went up 1% to 92%. Over the life of the grant, our pass rate is up 7%. Overall, 15 DMCI boys were unsuccessful compared with 13 boys last year. However, the data indicates that only one of the boys who was unsuccessful was in our Boys’ Literacy Club. It is important to remember that we tried to select the club members from the boys at most risk in our population. We also observed that there is not an absolute correlation between lexile reading scores and the OSSLT scores. One boy, an immigrant, who reads newspapers in Serbian daily, passed the OSSLT while another, whose lexile score was a full grade level higher, failed.
We could see that we were having an impact on the boys with whom we were working, but we wondered whether their grades or attendance would improve. We hoped for a strong correlation, but as we came to know the boys and appreciate their confidence and skill with multi-modal literacies, we began to wonder. The graph below shows that there was an improvement in both their overall averages and their attendance over the four reporting periods that we tracked.

For each year of the grant, the membership in our Boys’ Literacy Club changed slightly. Therefore, for reporting on grades and attendance, our sample included 18 boys who started with us in the spring or fall of 2006. Obviously, they are not in this year’s group of grade 10 boys, but they have remained library regulars and maintained a relationship with the literacy coordinator. We averaged their report card averages to create the blue line on the graph below. As the graph indicates, when they were actually involved in the peer tutoring, their overall school average went up from approximately 58% to 68%. It has now leveled off at around 64-65%.

We had our disappointments. Only one of the four grade 12 boys graduated. The other three are still here hoping — but not certain — that this will be the year they make the leap into the real world.

On the other hand, we’ve had notable successes. The reading lexile level jumped the equivalent of two grades in a few months and the overall averages are very high.

The orange line on the graph shows the trend in attendance in terms of the average number of classes missed. At the beginning of our project when interest, enthusiasm, and resources were plentiful, there was a sharp drop in the average number of missed classes. That too has leveled out, but we’re pleased that it remains lower than it was at the beginning of the project. Our boys are going to an average of ten more classes per semester than they were.

### Attendance & Achievement Data for Literacy Club Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classes Missed / Average Marks</th>
<th>June ’06</th>
<th>Jan. ’07</th>
<th>June ’07</th>
<th>Jan. ’08</th>
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<tr>
<td>Average Marks</td>
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<td>68.4</td>
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<td>Recorded Absences</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>46.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

All of us have come to embrace a larger view of the concept of literacy and to have more respect for multi-modal literacy for challenging our boys and meeting their need to survive in their world. We have learned that the simple and elegant transition we hoped for from “out-of-school literacy” to “in-school literacy” requires great patience and good will on both sides.

The boys in our programs came to identify the library as their natural habitat. They kept their reading books on a shelf at the back of the library office because they believed this was the only place they would read and if they took the book out, they would lose it. This system allowed the librarian to monitor their progress. Heartbreakingly often, a book that they read with great interest for the first few days would be abandoned. “It got boring”, they would tell us. Under closer questioning, it seemed they couldn’t remember the details and found it confusing when they went back.

Next year, in the Boys’ Literacy Club, we are going to try graphic novels, read aloud, and literature circles for small groups of kids and their tutors. For many of our boys, even those in grade 12, the last book they remember enjoying was *The Outsiders*, which was read to them in grade 7. If we want boys to read, we must break their resistance to what they see as a long, linear, and solitary experience. We already know from our surveys that they would overwhelmingly prefer to read graphic novels and even books online on a device such as Amazon Kindle. For us educators, although we want them to read, we are coming to accept that, for some boys, it won’t be books.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
*Slam* by Walter Dean Myers  
*The Dark Knight Returns* by Frank Miller

For professional development:  
*Reading Doesn’t Matter Anymore* by David Booth  
*Literacy Leadership: Six Strategies for Peoplework* by Donald McAndrew

Team Member Quote:  
“I’m teaching the grade 7 boys who were in the Literacy Club last year. It’s incredible how successful it was. There has been a 180 degree turnaround! Boys who were shy and unsure last year are eager to read aloud this year — without mistakes. They are more willing and more skilled than many of the kids in academic programs.”

Administrator Quote:  
“I’m seeing more boys in the library on a daily basis than before. They’re reading newspapers, books, magazines, and graphic novels and they’re feeling very comfortable — not just the highly academic boys, but all of them.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:  
out-of-school literacy; in-school literacy; linear; peer-tutoring; multi-modal
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Dr. G.J. MacGillivray P.S. – JK-8 Regular Program, SK- 8 French Immersion, 4-8 Gifted

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Jennifer Keller
Lisa Flanagan

Note: The teachers who were part of the first years of the project are no longer at this site.
**Essential Question:** Do single gender classes in Language Arts make a difference for boys’ (and girls’) literacy achievement?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- There was a distinct difference in the topics that boys and girls chose to read about; however, even when they were provided with the resources that interested them, the grade 8 boys did not demonstrate a significant increase in their motivation to read.

- The students’ attitudes and their perceptions of their abilities were determining factors in their performances.

- Resources are not the solution. Students’ attitudes and motivation are more important.

- The girls-only grade 8 class was far more successful with respect to attitudes and achievement than was the boys-only grade 8 class.

- Classroom management has the potential to be much more an issue with a boys-only class.

- We needed to alter teaching styles for both the girls and boys classes.

- CASI scores improved slightly for boys; however, report card grades were lower than the previous year.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

This year, we divided classes by gender for a 100-minute block per day only for language and math. Next year, we plan to have gender-specific classes – full day – in both the French Immersion Program and the regular program. We will complete class profiles and diagnostic assessments early in the year to determine benchmarks for comparison purposes. We will not have any rotary other than music and core french in order to better integrate all subjects into literacy and numeracy. Our goal will be a balanced literacy program and

**Student Quote:**

“Gender-specific classes made it easier for me to fit in as a new student to the school. I was able to make friends of my own gender more easily than I did in the past when I changed schools.”

“My marks went up.” (20 such quotes from both boys and girls)

“I could concentrate on my work easier without having to worry about socializing.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

The Boy's Literacy Project at Dr. G.J. MacGillivray began before my arrival as principal. Upon my arrival last year, I was informed by the previous principal that the project was completed, all the funds had been spent, and that a final report had been submitted. Ergo, I did not follow up on anything as we had a number of new initiatives from the Board which kept me occupied. This year, I was informed that we were to receive $2,000.00 to continue the work of the project. It is also to be noted that the team leader from the initial project and most of the other teachers involved had transferred or applied to other schools in the board. This is a large school with a lot of turnover because this area is a growing.

Late in the fall, I had a conversation with Barbara Bodkin and I informed her of the situation here. I proposed to her that I would use a pilot I was trying this year with gender-specific grade 8 classes for language and math in order to determine if the approach would make a positive impact on student achievement for boys and girls. Barbara approved this plan and she understood that our plan was not going to resemble the original plan. However, this was a better solution than dropping the entire project.

Since September, we purchased resources for the teachers such as:

- Why Gender Matters - What Parents and Teachers Need to Know About the Emerging Science of Sex Differences by Leonard Sax
- The Boys and Girls Learn Differently Action Guide for Teachers by Michael Gurian and Arlette C. Ballew

We also purchased resources for the students such as novels and magazine subscriptions deemed to be interesting to boys.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

Since the pilot project worked out well, I have decided to split the classes by gender all day next year. In our planning for the 2008-09 school year, I have organized two gender-specific grade 7/8 combined classes for both the regular program and the French Immersion program. The teachers involved will be asked to keep journals and anecdotal records and track data in order to determine the impact that gender-specific classes have on student achievement. We will do this in the form of an action research project. The intermediate staff and I believe that gender-specific classes will have a very positive impact on student achievement in all subjects, not just language and math, which was the case this year.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

"My daughter has flourished in the all-girls class."
"The boys class has not been as effective as it could have been due to negative behaviours. However, my son has read more often than he normally does."
"These classes demonstrate the need to program to the students' needs and interests, whether they are male or female."
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

- 20 of 22 girls (91%) in the all-girls class thought it was an awesome year as evidenced in their reflection pieces. Many mentioned that their grades went up and that they were more comfortable in this environment. Even the two who dissented did state that, overall, it was good. However, they liked having boys in the class too.

- In the boys-only grade 8 class, CASI scores increased by 10% over the year. However, report card grades were lower than they were last year.

- In the grade 8 girls class, CASI scores went up by 30%.

- Anecdotal data demonstrated significant success with the girls class and a feeling of dissatisfaction in the boys class.

- Parental input, in the form of conversations, indicated that the girls class was a success, but the parents felt that the boys had regressed.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Most of our data is anecdotal. This is a summary of data for only one year, not three years, and the information we have is based on less than one year of work.

• The boys did not enjoy being in a class without girls.

• The boys did not have the modelling of work habits and behaviour that the girls would have provided.

• Although the boys did willingly read more often than they would have due to the boys’ literacy resources we provided, we did not consistently observe this outcome.

• The all-girls class was a tremendous success. The girls flourished under this organization. Only two girls would have preferred boys in the class.

• Boys require direct and precise interventions far more often than do girls.

• Boys truly do prefer to read different materials than girls prefer to read; however, there are some similarities.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Reflection on Girls-Only Math/English Classes
by Lisa Flanagan, girls class, 2007-08

A. Introductory Thoughts
Through my work in independent schools, I had witnessed gender-based education and was excited to begin working with the girls classes. Michael Gurian’s and Leonard Sax’s texts were good starting points and helped me gain an understanding of the science behind the arguments for gender-based learning. I also used my growing understanding of the interests and lives of adolescent girls to move forward.

B. Teaching Strategies
For Math:
• Explicit use of examples to model big concepts, formulas, and problem-solving.
• Use of manipulatives and games.
• Authentic tasks geared to girls’ interests.
• Use of math circle (teacher and peer led) to facilitate “math talk” and help students with challenging material.
• Open forum for questions and assistance – girls comfortable to seek assistance from peers and teacher.

For English:
• Use of reading material geared to girls’ interests (biographies of famous women, poetry, student-selected and teacher-selected teen fiction for girls, Romeo and Juliet).
• Importance of summary and connections in all reading/writing activities.
• 6+1 Traits and writing opportunities based on girls’ interests (girls’ voice assignment, poetry folio, spooky stories, and journal reflection).
• Oral/Visual Communication – differentiated the traditional speech for girls-only class (option of group presentation, awards ceremony, graduation speeches, and how-to’s), poetry reading, peace circle discussions, and sex education.

C. Results and Final Reflection
The approach of “gender-based classes” is differentiated instruction because teaching and learning is organized and facilitated based on the specific needs of boys and girls. This has been a tremendous year of growth for me as an educator and learner. I have gained a greater understanding of how girls (myself included) learn better and more deeply. This understanding guided my practices and planning and I believe student achievement improved. I feel empowered and passionate about my unique experience and recommend that the pilot program continue and possibly extend into other curricular areas such as physical education/health. I cannot reflect on the past three years, as I was not the principal for the previous two years and most of the staff who were part of the project are no longer here.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

- We realize the importance of knowing students and creating class profiles.
- Boys learn differently than do girls in all subject areas.
- We must differentiate our instruction and assessment/evaluation methods for boys and girls in all grades.
- For classroom management purposes, boys require more structure and interventions than do girls.
- We need to learn more about the emerging science of sex differences.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Subscriptions to appropriate magazines that the boys select themselves.
Appropriate novels that the boys select themselves.

For professional development:
Why Gender Matters - What Parents and Teachers Need to Know About the Emerging Science of Sex Differences by Leonard Sax
The Boys and Girls Learn Differently Action Guide for Teachers by Michael Gurian and Arlette C. Ballew

Team Member Quote: I am quoting both team members who had identical reflections: “We believe that gender-based intermediate classes have a lot of merit despite our lack of success with the boys group. We are excited at the prospect of having two gender-specific grades 7/8 classes for the entire day next year. This will give us an opportunity to integrate other subjects into the literacy block and truly delineate the differences

Administrator Quote: “We have learned a great deal from this experience. The most important is that on-going assessment to drive instruction and precise interventions are necessary to ensure an increase in student achievement. We need to set Level 3 or Level 4 as our standard. Students should not be given the choice to not complete an assignment

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes: boys and girls; gender; differentiated instruction and assessment; structure; interventions
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Toronto District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Dr. Norman Bethune Collegiate Institute
Grades 9 and 10

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Mark Kaminsk
Nora Guthrie
Pat Klassen
Karen Ireland
Skjold Hook
Mark Till
Heather Fearon
Abbie Villamin
Whitney Aziz
Barry Copping
Brian Wilkinson
David Parmer
James Ishiguro
Bruce Van Den Eynde
**Essential Question:**
What are the effects on boys' reading habits when exposed to a wide variety of "high interest" reading materials?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Our acquisition, promotion, and circulation of “high interest” reading materials for boys, which we made available in the school library, resulted in an enormous increase (259% in the first year) in reading among our grade 9 boys.

- Our use of the boys' version of the *White Pine Reading Program* (a select list of the best titles for boys from the last five years of the program) resulted in a six-fold increase in the number of boys participating, with an average of four books read per student. A grade 10 boys' reading program (using the James Bond theme, *Licensed to Read*) is being developed for the following year.

- Due to the Asian composition of our student body, our acquisition of a core collection of *Manga Books* (Japanese graphic novels) resulted in a significant surge in boys' reading and accounted for 35% of all circulation. In fact, 12 boys read close to 1,000 manga titles over the course of the school year.

- We worked cooperatively with the grade 9 teachers to encourage boys to read through the use of USSR, frequent library visits, author visits, and targeted reading programs and used reading logs to track the boys' reading. The grade 9 boys read 2,477 titles collectively. Each boy read an average of 22 books.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

- Some of our teachers were not fully aware of the disparity in reading between girls and boys (e.g., early data revealed that the ratio was 3 to 1 at our school) and, when they became aware, were more committed supporters of the project.

- We expanded the boys' reading logs to include other forms of reading not always accepted by English teachers (e.g., non-fiction, manga, comics, and magazines).

- Due to the high interest in Japanese manga and American comic books, some Bethune teachers were able to develop assignments that required an examination and comparison of the two forms of graphic novels.

- A reading habits survey indicated significant interest in newspapers and magazines; therefore, some teachers provided more opportunities to use these and also made use of media literacy strategies to integrate this on a regular basis.

- Some of the data from the reading survey revealed that we have a small number of boys who are reluctant readers and we hope to address this problem with early identification and strategies to encourage these boys to read.

**Student Quote:**
“Upon seeing the large manga collection (approximately 500 titles) in the library, some new grade 9 boys have been known to say: ‘I’ve died and gone to manga heaven.’”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Background
Although Bethune boys do well on the EQAO Literacy Test, the EQAO questionnairie results show that our boys read less and enjoy reading even less than girls. Our library circulation statistics show that the ratio of circulation for girls vs. boys is 3 to 1 and becomes wider in the senior grades.

Resources
The ministry funding for this project allowed us to invest in a wide variety of “high interest” materials, including:
- The White Pine Reading Program for boys (a select list of the best titles for boys from the last five years of the program);
- An extensive manga collection as well as manga magazines (Shojo Beat, Shonen Jump, and New Type USA);
- A wide selection of biographies that appeal to boys (e.g., sports, music, and adventure);
- A wide selection of young adult titles as well as genre titles (e.g., adventure/thriller and science fiction/fantasy); and
- A wide selection of magazines (e.g., sports, music, PC gaming, entertainment, computers, cars and science & tech).

Instructional Strategies
Some of the instructional strategies we used included:
- 15 to 20 minute Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR) program for all grade 9 students, along with reading logs to track the items read;
- Frequent visits to the library with book talks on genre that appeal to boys (e.g., action adventure, thrillers, movie tie-ins, sports, and biographies);
- Specific reading programs targeted at boys (e.g., the White Pine Reading Program for boys);

Highlights
Some of the highlights of our project included:
- The establishment of a designated room for boys in the library that housed all the “high interest” materials for boys;
- The launch of a manga club, which then spawned anime and cosplay clubs;
- A visit from Dwayne Morgan—a former Bethune student and Juno award-winning spoken word artist/poet—who gave an inspirational talk to the whole school on the importance of reading and writing;
- A visit from Svetlana Chmakova—a manga artist/author—whose new series Dramacon was very popular;
- A visit from Richard Scarsbrook whose YA novel Cheeseburger Subversive was the funniest book on the White Pinereading list; and
- The recognition—with certificates and book prizes—of top boy readers and most improved boy readers in each grade 9 class.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

- We will develop a grade 10 boys’ reading program that will include both YA titles and genre titles (e.g., Catcher in the Rye, Adrian Mole series, Hound of the Baskervilles, DaVinci Code, and the James Bond series);
- Given the significant interest in graphic novels, we will develop a boys’ graphic reading program that will include both manga and superhero comics;
- We will launch a manga book club that will meet monthly and discuss titles students are currently reading;
- We will in-service the whole Bethune staff on boys’ literacy using the Me Read? No Way! guide published by the ministry and identify strategies and practices that can be implemented into various areas of the curriculum; and
- We will create a list of boys’ favorite titles as identified by male staff members.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Reading Habits Survey
We conducted a grade 9 Reading Habits Survey that looked at boys’ reading habits, attitudes to reading, frequency of reading, and type of materials boys were reading outside of class.

Some of the questions included:
- How much do you enjoy reading?
- How often do you read outside of school?
- Which of the following do you read out of class (e.g., magazines, newspapers, and biographies)?
- What types of fiction do you like reading (e.g., adventure, science fiction and crime/mystery)?

Student Reading Logs
In September, we developed student reading logs to track boys’ reading over the course of the school year. Students were asked to record each title read, provide a brief commentary about the book, and also give the book a rating out of 5. The reading logs allowed us to measure the type of reading material selected by students as well as the frequency of reading.

Library Circulation Statistics
We collected library circulation statistics available through our Horizon-Reportsmith system. The Reportsmith generator allowed us to compare 2005-06 statistics with 2006-07 and to break down these statistics by grade and gender. The library circulation statistics allowed us to measure whether “high interest” reading materials resulted in the boys in our school reading more, particularly in grade 9.

White Pine Reading Program Checklist and Log
As part of the White Pine Reading Program, we designed a reading checklist and log to track which books the boys read and to provide opportunities for them to write brief comments about each book.

Note: As a way to encourage more boys to participate in the White Pine Reading Program, we modified the program by creating a boys’ version that included the most “high interest” titles from the last 5 years of the program. Almost all of the titles chosen had a boy protagonist and either had compelling story lines and characters or were funny.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Library Circulation Statistics
In 2005-06, boys at Bethune checked out 1,736 items from the library, while in 2006-07 they signed out 4,507 books — this marks an increase of 259%. Furthermore, as most of our efforts on the boys’ literacy project targeted the grade 9 boys, we discovered that 57% of all materials signed out were signed out by grade 9 boys; whereas, in 2005-06 the percentage was 34%.

The largest increase in boys’ reading was related to the manga collection, which we launched in September 2006 — it accounted for close to 35% of all circulation by boys.

White Pine Reading Program Checklist and Log
In 2005-06, we had about four boys out of 83 students participating in the White Pine Reading Program. After modifying the program to include only boys’ titles, we noticed 23 boys out of 72 students taking part, with boys reading an average of four books.

Student Reading Logs
When collated, the boys’ reading logs indicated that grade 9 boys had read 2,477 titles collectively and that, on average, each boy read 22 books. This figure is somewhat skewed by the boys who read manga titles — twelve boys read close to 1,000 manga titles. (One student read over 350 manga titles.)

Reading Habits Survey
The reading habits survey revealed some interesting results:

- How much do you enjoy reading?
  12% not at all  44% a bit  32% Quite a lot  12% very much

- How often do you read outside of school?
  28% every day  32% once or twice a week  20% once or twice a month  20% never or almost

- Which of the following do you read outside of class? (Top 10 responses)
  66% websites, e-mail, chat  56% novels, fiction, short stories  56% magazines  51% newspapers  38% song lyrics  26% comic books  26% manga  25% biographies  23% books with movie tie-ins  22% joke books

- What types of fiction do like reading? (Top 10 responses)
  62% adventure  53% comedy  50% crime/mystery  44% science fiction  44% fantasy  42% horror/ghost  37% teen fiction  30% sports  22% manga  13% poetry/lyrics

From the preliminary data collected so far, we have seen a significant increase in reading among our grade 9 boys. However, the reading survey data also indicated more work needs to be done with reluctant readers who do not enjoy reading and read infrequently outside of school.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Excerpt from the June 2007 Bethune School Newsletter.

Bethune student reads over 350 books…

J., a grade 9 Bethune student, has done the unthinkable! He has read almost every single Manga title (Japanese comics) in his school library. Since September, J. has read over 350 Manga titles and in his spare time he eats, sleeps, and breaths Manga. On average, J. reads about 2-3 books a day and has been reading since grade 5. His favourite Manga titles include Tubasa and Neon Genesis as well as regular fantasy titles. His interest in Manga comes from its ability to tell interesting and compelling stories in graphic form and continue them in multi-volume series.

In addition to J., there are close to 25 students who have read over 100 Manga titles. In fact, one in every four students in the school reads manga regularly. This interest has spawned a Manga club, an Anime (Japanese film animation) club and a Cosplay (costume play) club.

Since last spring, when Bethune Collegiate received a significant grant from the Ministry of Education to support boys’ literacy, the Manga collection in the library increased from 0 to over 500 books, with over 100 different titles. As a result, the Bethune library has consistently had the highest circulation of any secondary school library in TDSB.

Part of the fascination of Manga is not only the combination of story, character, and graphic art, but the variety of genre available in the Manga format. Romance, science fiction/fantasy, sports, and historical genre are all available as Manga, including Shakespearean titles such as Macbeth and Romeo and Juliet.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

- English teachers in grades 9 and 10 now strongly urge boys to participate in independent reading and boys' reading programs.

- We have found that male role models who read are important in encouraging boys to read. (Dwayne Morgan, a Juno award-winning spoken word artist and former Bethune student, was very inspirational for many boys when he came to speak).

- Due to the ethnic composition of the school, which is 70% Asian, we discovered that the boys had a significant interest in Japanese comics and have encouraged such spin-offs as Manga, Anime and Cosplay clubs as a way to foster boys' involvement with extra-curricular literacy activities.

- Teachers have modified teaching styles by incorporating more authentic activities in the classroom. In particular the grade 9 final summative assessment — a biography presentation — allowed boys to express themselves through a wide variety of presentation styles.

- We involve boys in the selection of new reading materials and include them in shopping trips to Chapters and The Beguiling (a comic/manga store).

- We are striving to match the right book to the right reader, especially with some reluctant readers who have difficulty finding the right book.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:

- White Pine Reading Program for boys (a select list of the best boy titles from the last five years of the White Pine program)
- An extensive manga collection as well as manga magazines (e.g., Shojo Beat, Shonen Jump, and New Type USA)
- A wide selection of biographies that appeal to boys (e.g., sports, music, and adventure)
- A wide selection of young adult titles as well as genre titles (e.g., adventure/thriller and science fiction/fantasy)
- A wide selection of magazines (e.g., sports, music, PC gaming, entertainment, computers, cars, and science & technology)

For professional development:

- Me Read? No Way! — Ontario Ministry of Education
- Boys and Reading: Practical Strategies for Librarians, Teachers and Parents
- The Power of Reading
- Teenage Boys and High School English
- Professional Communities at Work

Team Member Quote:

“If the goal of library programs is to match the right book to the right reader, then having an extensive collection of “high interest” reading materials for boys goes a long way towards making this happen.”

Administrator Quote:

“Mr. Kaminski and his team created positive, interesting, and engaging opportunities to draw our student population, especially the boys, into the library and hooked them on current reading materials they enjoyed.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:

manga; White Pine Reading Program; library collections; reading surveys and logs; graphic novels
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Halton District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
E.C. Drury High School – Grades 9 to 11 (Essential Level males)

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Rebecca Newcombe
Shawn Morris
Justin Tasev
Ross Thomson
Bob Mavro
Alison Brownlee
Bonita Stephenson

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
**Essential Question:**
By providing accessibility and ample opportunity to use assistive technology (Dragon, Kurzweil, Write:Outloud, CoWriter, Smart Ideas, and AlphaSmarts) and providing sufficient training to a focus group of grade 9 boys, accompanied with appropriate resources, will these boys be more engaged, be more successful, and have an increase in credit accumulation in English, Geography, Mathematics, and Science courses over the next three years?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

The boys in our project tended to be visual learners, hence graphic novels were effective. The boys also gravitated towards technology. In addition, we found that when boys complete smaller assignments and meet in small, fluid groups to work through issues, we were better able to address their needs and encourage cooperative learning. They thrived when given an appropriate challenge and assistance in meeting it. The boys wanted challenging content and tasks that changed how they thought, or helped them to do things better. They wanted enough help to be successful, but only when they needed it. The boys wanted to use what they had read or written to clearly demonstrate their growing competence.

Appropriate resources were critical to engaging these boys. We found the most success with graphic novels. The students read the graphic novel “The Pride of Baghdad”. They were motivated to read the novel as it is in a visually engaging form, different from the typical novel. Providing the text in smaller chunks made the task manageable, but still challenging.

Further, the use of technology was critical to engaging our male learners. When computers are in the classroom and the programs are integrated into the curriculum, the students get the full benefits of assistive technology. If the technology is an “add-on”, the students will not integrate the programs into their learning. One knows there is success when the students, independently, go to the computer to use a specific assistive technology program.

We learned that by improving boys’ literacy skills we could increase credit accumulation, ensure more boys were on track to graduate, and consequently close the achievement gap for boys working at the essential level.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**
The integration of technology and the use of engaging resources had the greatest impact on our instructional practices. Other impacts on our instructional practices included:
- small groups/mentoring to encourage the boys and help them understand the technology;
- the choose of meaningful pieces of work to complete;
- teaching concepts and generalizations relevant to boys' interests;
- implementing a lot of choice and personal experience into assigned work; and
- monitoring the amount of praise (frequency).

These factors increased student engagement and improved their confidence.

The use of technology also had an impact on our assessment practices. The assistive software improved reading comprehension, enabled students to organize their ideas, and increased the quality of their written work. We were able to see our students’ capabilities; the technology enabled students to produce work that showcased their true abilities.

**Student Quote:**
Regarding the graphic novels, one male grade 9 essential student from the 2007-08 cohort stated, “I like these graphic novels because you have writing to read and [the pictures] help you to understand what they are doing.”

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Typically, our essential level male students were disengaged, had low self-confidence, and did not find value in improving their literacy skills. These boys seemed to be significantly disengaged from school. They perceived traditional assignments (pen and paper) as boring, and did not see the relevance of developing their literacy skills for life after high school.

Therefore, we implemented the *Me Read? No Way!* research related to the use of technology (pg. 40) and appropriate classroom resources (pg. 8). We wanted to develop our boys’ literacy skills by implementing different strategies to meet their needs and use their interests to engage them.

Many of the students were apprehensive about using the technology and it was one of the biggest obstacles we had to overcome. They were not familiar with the assistive technology programs. However, once the students became familiar with the technology, they wanted to continue to use it.

It was a challenge for staff to learn the technology and implement it into the curriculum. At times, there was an interesting dynamic between students and staff; that is, the boys taught staff many features of the assistive technology programs. Once engaged with the technology, the male students were motivated to learn the different features it had to offer.

We experienced the most success when the technology was integrated into the curriculum and the students used it on a regular basis.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

Our next steps include:

- striving for 100% overall credit accumulation for male grade 9 essential students;
- expanding the technology in all classrooms with a consistent assistive technology approach in a supportive environment;
- providing further PD and training on assistive technology to general classroom staff;
- planning on how we can sustain and improve our current success;
- increasing the number of computers in both essential level classrooms;
- introducing other assistive technology software (e.g., Comic Life); and
- continuing to monitor credit accumulation and graduation rates for essential level male students.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

Regarding the benefits of assistive technology, a mother of one grade 9 essential male student in the 2005-06 cohort stated, “Assistive technology has the capacity to increase opportunities for students with disabilities to receive academic equality and socially participate in a general classroom environment which, in turn, increases their odds of a lifetime of social, economic, and academic independence in an otherwise exclusionary society.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Qualitative Data: Student Attitudes

Our essential question asked, “Will these boys be more engaged?”

One cohort of boys completed a Reading and Writing Attitudinal Survey in October 2007 and again in May 2008. The results indicated an improvement in the cohort’s attitudes towards reading and writing. The cohort included 13 grade 9 essential level boys.

Specifically, 13% more of the boys felt that they could learn new things from books; 15% more liked to read a book and answer questions about it, and 8% more liked to write stories on their own time.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Quantitative Data: Credit Accumulation

Our essential question asked, “Will these boys have an increase in credit accumulation in English, Geography, Mathematics, and Science courses over the next three years?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Grade 9</th>
<th>Grade 10</th>
<th>Grade 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>91.67%</td>
<td>96.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>88.75%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chart above is a summary of credit accumulation for three cohorts of grade 9 essential level classes. The first cohort (2005-06) is currently in grade 11. This cohort has an exceptional credit accumulation — 96% of these students are on track to graduate!

The decrease in grade 9 credit accumulation (-8%) between the 2006-07 cohort and the 2007-08 cohort is connected to a program change. Enrollment in the essential level program at our school increased and we now have two classes of grade 9 essential level students. For 2005-06 and 2006-07, we had only one grade 9 essential level class. The 2007-08 cohort required two separate classrooms to accommodate the growth of the program. Both classrooms now share the assistive technology that was originally housed in one classroom.

Despite the decrease, our essential level male students have been exceptionally successful. All cohorts are exceeding our board’s Student Success goal of “85% of grade 10 students will accumulate 16 credits by August 31, 2008”. Furthermore, all cohorts are on track to exceed the Ministry of Education’s goal of an “85% graduation rate by 2010-11”.

The data suggests that a classroom well equipped with technology increases students’ credit accumulation and that we need to better equip our classrooms with assistive technology to ensure student success.
Overall, as shown in the graph below, our grade 9 essential level male students have been successful in credit accumulation.

Our data demonstrates that when computers and assistive technology are in the classroom and are integrated into the curriculum, students benefit fully from the assistive technology. When the technology is an "add-on", the students will not integrate the programs into their learning. We know we have success when the students independently go to the computer to use Kurzweil, Dragon, CoWriter, or an Alphasmart. When the technology and the curriculum are integrated, the students improve their levels of performance.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

This inquiry solidified our commitment to the belief that all students can learn. It is up to us as educators to differentiate instruction and use students’ interests to engage them in learning.

We have developed a deeper understanding of our students. Our current high school students are part of Generation Y. Giselle Kovary of n-gen People Performance (www.ngenperformance.com) states that technology impacts these students’ learning styles. They have a need for technology and they have a deep connection with it. This inquiry confirmed for us that technology is the key to engaging today’s male students.

We have witnessed the impact that appropriate resources have on student engagement. Graphic novels, books on extreme sports (e.g., WWE, snowboarding, motorcycles), and books on extreme facts (e.g., Ripley's Encyclopedia of the Bizarre) are all resources that have proven to gain and sustain the interest of our male students.

As educators, we have seen that it is possible to close the achievement gap with typically disengaged learners. The knowledge that we have had such an impact is exciting and motivating!

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Graphic novels
High interest, lower vocabulary books on topics such as extreme sports and WWE
Assitive Technology (Kurzweil, Write:Outloud, CoWriter, Smart Ideas, AlphaSmarts, and Dragon Naturally Speaking)

For professional development:
Bridges — Assistive Technology Company that provides professional development

Team Member Quote:
“Grade 9 essential level students do not consider a 200 page novel with small print and no pictures stimulating. It [the graphic novel] is easy to read — it has action, lots of visuals, and a good story line that keeps the students wanting to read.”
— Grade 9 essential level English teacher

Administrator Quote:
“I am extremely pleased with the outcome of this project. We continually search for ways to improve student achievement. This project has given us tools that can impact the success of future essential level students.”— Principal

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
assistive technology; graphic novels; essential level students; literacy skills, credit accumulation
Final School Report: 2008
Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Algoma District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Echo Bay Public School – Grades 1-8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Laurie Bouliane
Linda Kirby
Anna Shantz
Lisa Hebert
Krista Lappage
Maria Gallo
Maria Dalton
Erin Parker
Jennifer Runde
Jennifer Courtney

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
Essential Question:
Does short, focused, hands-on reading instruction — matching individual learning strengths and needs — have a positive impact on the development of boys' literacy skills?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Need short focused intervention blocks
- Need targeted, deliberate, strategic, intentional instruction
- Need knowledge of starting points of students' strengths
- Need to deliberately differentiate instruction based on knowledge of students' starting points
- Need ongoing assessment to drive instruction (every 4-6 weeks Professional Learning Communities)
- Positive student engagement is important

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

Instruction
- We have developed a better understanding of “gradual release of responsibility”.
- We have used the components of comprehensive literacy to improve student achievement (read aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, word study).
- We carefully select text to ensure student engagement.
- Our instructional practices are based on the identification of the students' starting points (i.e.; strengths, learning styles, attitudes, interests) and next steps.
- Our instructional strategies are intentional and strategic.

Assessment
- When we differentiate our instructional approaches, we align our assessment practices accordingly.
- We now intentionally set targets, engage in ongoing formative assessment to drive our instruction, and reassess student progress every four to six weeks to determine next steps.
- We have a more consistent understanding and application of appropriate assessment tools.
- We have far greater teacher collaboration and collective ownership for students’ achievement and engagement.

Student Quote:
“I really love the games that we play – Making Words, when we guess words, Bingo … The first time I played the Word Game, I smoked everyone!”

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This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

The Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry has been a great success within our school community! There has been growth in teacher understanding as well as student achievement. There has been a re-culturing at many levels: teacher collaboration, planning, deliberate and strategic instruction, assessment, data collection and analysis, and student engagement.

During the first year of the inquiry, Echo Bay Public School had two different administrators. Teachers focused their efforts on purchasing resources to support the inquiry. With the arrival of a third administrator, the inquiry was refocused and the initial “essential question” was refined.

Over the past two years, the staff and administration have focused on the following practices and brought them into alignment with the “essential question” of our boys’ literacy inquiry project:

- PLC’s were introduced and a strategic year-long plan was developed.
- Staff were trained to administer DRA and running records as diagnostic tools.
- Used teacher moderation and analysis of DRA, as well as student attitude and interest surveys, to determine starting points.
- All students from Grades 1-8 were placed on a tracking board.
- At-risk students’ data (qualitative and quantitative data, including DRA) were discussed and analyzed.
- At-risk students were placed into Focus Intervention Groups based on strengths and next steps.
- An instructional focus was selected for each group (e.g.; Fluency).
- Instructional strategies were selected for each group (e.g.; Echo Reading which is hands-on, deliberate, and strategic).
- Resources were selected to support the instructional strategy for each group.
- Targets and timelines were set for each student within the group.
- An assessment tool was selected for the group to be administered at the end of the Focused Intervention Block.
- Timelines for Focused Intervention Blocks and, therefore PLC’s, were held approximately every four to six weeks when teachers met to discuss the achievements of our students and our team through:
  - Data
  - Discussion and analysis
  - Collaboration
  - Celebration
  - Accountability through group consensus and planning

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

We would like to continue with Focused Intervention Groups within our entire school community, but we also recognize the need for time to consolidate and become more precise with how we target our instruction to meet students’ needs. With a high rate of staff turnover for the 2008-09 school year, we are looking forward to building capacity with new staff and sharing the new model that we have in place to support our students towards success in literacy. This model has been so successful in literacy, that we are in the early phases of transferring it into our mathematics program as Focused Numeracy Intervention Groups, using the PRIME assessment tool as our baseline. Thank you!

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“Find the genre they love and they’ll be “in the book” before you know it. You won’t want to get them to do any chores.”

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This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Quantitative: Primary
Tracking Board
Running Records – every four to six weeks
Report Cards – every term
EQAO – Student achievement results

Qualitative: Primary
Observations
Interest and Attitude Surveys
Individual Reading Logs
Student Profiles (collection of evidence)
EQAO – Detailed School Report

Primary Findings: Data within the Charts
Grade 1 – 7 out of 10 students made significant gains
Grade 2 – 6 out of 7 students made significant gains
Grade 3 – 7 out of 9 students made significant gains

Quantitative: Junior/Intermediate
Tracking Board
Comprehension Strategies Rubric from 4-8 DRA
Report Cards
EQAO – Student achievement results

Qualitative: Junior/Intermediate
Observations
Interest and Attitude Surveys
Individual Reading Logs
EQAO – Detailed School Report

Junior/Intermediate Findings: Data within the Charts
Group A – Summary – 3 out of 5 students moved levels
Group B – Prediction – 4 out of 6 students moved levels
Group C – Summary – both students stayed at the same level, but moved up within the level
Group D – Phrasing – all 4 students moved up a level
Group E – Phrasing – all 4 students moved up a level

For Interpretation
Group A – 3 out of 3 students moved
Group B – out of 6 students, 4 moved 1 level and 2 moved 2 levels
Group C – out of 5 students, all moved 1 level
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

EQAO RESULTS

Grade 3 EQAO Reading Results - Percentage at Levels 3 & 4

Grade 6 EQAO Reading Results - Percentage at Levels 3 & 4
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)
EQAO RESULTS (cont.)

PRIMARY FINDINGS
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)
JUNIOR/INTERMEDIATE FINDINGS

Junior Intermediate Literacy Focus Group

Junior Intermediate Literacy Focus Group - Interpretation
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

- We have moved from a collegial staff to a collaborative staff.
- Our PLC’s, while focused on student achievement, had the added benefit of increasing our staff capacity — as we deliberately planned as a team and celebrated our students’ successes.
- We are more intentional and strategic with our instruction.
- We differentiate our instruction, as our student groupings are based on data analysis, teacher observation, and assessments.
- We understand that instructional focus, text selection, instructional approaches, and selection of assessment tools must all match student groups.
- For boys to stay engaged and successful, we understand that instruction must be short and focused, with a hands-on approach.
- We understand that targets and timelines must be set for each student within the groups.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- High interest, often graphic texts, based on information gathered through interest/attitude surveys
- Informational and non-fiction materials (e.g., Skyrider Charts for shared reading)
- Literacy embedded in computer applications of hyper texts and google search engines
- Picture books (short, visual) vs. novel study

For professional development:
- Debbie Miller, Reading With Meaning
- Stephanie Harvey, Strategies That Work
- Ardith Cole, Better Answers
- Fontas and Pinnell, Teaching For Comprehending and Fluency

Team Member Quote:
“We work hard at providing students with “Just Right” books and at being deliberate and focused about our instruction — it is truly rewarding when a child comes to us and says, “May I read to you?”

Administrator Quote:
“Our PLC team meetings operate very much in the same manner as a medical team at Sick Kids’ Hospital in Toronto. The medical team gathers together to look at all the data and develop a plan, which includes a specific medical strategy. The plan is put into place in order to support the strategy and health targets set for the patient. A timeline for re-assessment is noted and all members understand their respective jobs. Everyone is critical to the health and well-being of the child. The same is true in education, yet our focus is literacy.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes: deliberate, strategic, intentional, Focused Intervention, EQAO
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Bluewater District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Egremont Community Public School – Grades JK-8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
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John Mattys
Clare Shannon
Darrell Beacon
Ruth Wilkin
Gretta Hutton — Principal
Heather Renton — McPhail Memorial Elementary

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
**Essential Question:** How can accountable talk improve boys’ attitudes towards literacy and their ability to communicate in writing?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Accountable talk is an essential process to engage boys and to improve their attitudes towards literacy.
- Accountable talk is an essential process to assist boys in both processing and communicating their thinking.
- A reliable alternative to demonstrating understanding through written responses is to provide boys “not achieving” at grade level with opportunities to participate in discussion with grade-level peers and to share their thinking.
- The regular use of accountable talk strategies does not necessarily improve boys’ abilities to communicate at a higher level on formal written assessment tasks where discussion is *not allowed*.
- When boys are provided the opportunity to share their thinking prior to a written assignment (e.g., reading response, writing task), it appears that their ability to communicate in writing for that task improves.
- Our recommendation is to integrate purposeful talk strategies into all grades across the curriculum, including some formal assessments (e.g., prior to OWA writing tasks).
- We believe that a wide spread use of recordable MP3 players will provide a greater percentage of boys the ability to participate and subsequently demonstrate achievement at Levels 3 or 4.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

We re-examined the way we deliver program and shifted away from the Socratic method to a more dialogic one. We replaced commercial worksheets with purposeful talk in partners and in small and whole groups. Students and teachers now explore and discuss texts, the big ideas, and the issues that emerge from curriculum topics in a deeper way. Often, we slow down the rate of delivery and give students more time to consolidate understanding and delve deeper into issues that matter.

We are evolving into critical data analyzers. We used and modified several versions of data walls to track CASI, OWA, and On the Mark results. Our principal and several staff were trained to use the DATA DRIVEN computer program to track and analyze data (CASI, OWA, On the Mark, EQAO, common math assessments, and report card marks). Now, all staff are beginning to use DATA DRIVEN systematically to set SMART goals, plan units, and make decisions about instructional groupings. Because we initially focused on “purposeful talk”, we became more astute observers and learned how the role of “guide on the side” increases students’ initiative. We have broadened how we assess students’ work. We now use fewer paper and pencil tests. We have worked through the Teacher Moderation Resource webcasts from the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat and have moderated students’ writing in both CASI and OWA.

**Student Quote:**

“I read better now, I think, because of these conversations. It makes me understand reading more. I think it’s because now I talk about the book and I’m not just reading words. So then it can make sense in my brain. You get to talk to different people. That’s how I got to be a better reader. P.S. I love conversation!” — Remedial Grade 4 Boy

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This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
**WHAT IS OUR STORY?**

Our journey began when we volunteered to be one of two pilot schools in our board to participate in York Region’s literacy collaborative. First, we focussed on a school-wide question about the role of “purposeful talk” in improving boys’ literacy achievement. Wow! Little did we know what a journey this would be! As our team began wading into the wonderful world of Change Management Leadership, we realized what a complex process we had initiated.

We looked at our teaching through the “lens” of boys and what they need to achieve success. We worked through *Me Read? No Way!* and integrated the strategies into our plans. We brought in male role models to read to us and ordered graphic novels and engaging non-fiction texts. We downloaded Audible.com books and purchased MP3 players to provide students access to books beyond their reading levels and allow them to participate in book talks with their peers. We increased the variety and frequency of opportunities for accountable talk.

Our boys’ attitudes towards reading and writing improved. Now, a large majority of them enjoy participating in literacy activities and consider themselves readers and writers. Many of the boys who have not achieved at the provincial standard in traditional assessments have demonstrated, through our literature conversations that they are capable of thinking deeply and critically as they discuss the texts they hear and read.

We have grown together tremendously as a professional learning community. It was simultaneously energizing and exhausting to work through a common focus. Our early book study of, *Knee-to-Knee, Eye-to-Eye* was a catalyst for change and we implemented the steps suggested. We observed, discussed, and planned collaboratively. We videotaped and modeled for one another and became increasingly open to examining our practices and working through change together.

We honed our observation skills as we attempted to note how “accountable talk” was affecting boys’ abilities to “ink their thinking”. This gave us numerous opportunities to self-reflect and critically analyze our practices. We began to look at data more purposefully. A majority of staff members have noted the professional book study process as a highlight.

In Year Two, it was a challenge to maintain momentum after such an exciting start! We went through a major renovation, which consumed time, energy, and resources. We also did not collect enough appropriate pre-project data to track the growth in attitudes we noticed. Another challenge has been the requirement that we present “our project” to various groups including our school council, our boards’ trustees, the teaching staff in our “school group”, Bluewater’s and York’s Literacy Fairs, the Quest conference, and administrator meetings. We are now more comfortable, but at first found it difficult to put the breadth and depth of our work and the impact our project has had on our school and community into words.

**WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?**

We plan to:

- continue to bring in male role models to share how reading and writing are used in their lives/occupations;
- work with our board’s Student Services and IT departments to make Audible.com books available system wide;
- continue to be part of our Change Management initiatives and have diagnosticians come into our school to look through our plans, discuss lessons with students, examine class and school walls, talk to staff and the principal, give us regular “Capacity Building Reports”, and provide us with a comprehensive template of where we need to go next;
- continue to develop our ability as a staff to implement a comprehensive literacy approach;
- continue to work with the excellent documents and support resources provided by LNS;
- become increasingly competent in differentiating instruction (e.g., by gender) by refining our ability to review assessment data (e.g., use of the DATA DRIVEN computer program);
- continue to use W. Daggett’s rigor/relevance model; and
- hold another professional book study using the book, *Asking Better Questions* to continue the process of using our PLC’s as a vehicle to improve student achievement.

**Parent/Guardian Quote:**

“My son tells me that conversations with his class give him lots of ideas. Then when he’s reading, it helps him stay reading. He uses clues in his head that they have talked about to make sense of a book. I say, “Hooray for letting him talk before he sets out to read and write on his own!”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

This multi-year action research project was extremely useful and revealing to us. As we began to discuss and examine both qualitative and quantitative data in the first year, we realized that the analysis of data needed to be a definite “area for growth” in our school. We were not collecting quantitative data (e.g.; On the Mark Reading Level testing in primary) in a consistent manner across the division. As we began moderating written responses to reading using CASI in the junior and intermediate grades, we found much the same theme. Therefore, at the end of the project, we can not say that our results based on these two tests are entirely reliable and valid. The process of “collectively rolling up our sleeves” and “digging through the results” has been valuable professional development. Teachers report that they have improved in their ability to observe how various instructional practices (e.g.; use of accountable talk strategies) affect boys’ and girls’ levels of engagement. All staff have reported that the most valuable data has been the qualitative observations they made daily in their classrooms. As accountable talk strategies increased in frequency and duration, everyone reported seeing positive changes in students’ willingness to participate in and their interest in literacy tasks.

Throughout the three years, we conducted numerous mini-inquiries related to our essential question. For example, we did OWA writing assessments with and without pre-writing discussions and compared the results. Boys were interviewed about how they comprehended texts with and without discussion. We read the same picture books to all students in grades 5-8 (Gift of the Magi) and in K-grade 3 (The Crooked Little Christmas Tree) and made double entry journals to compare the quality of written reading responses across these groups for pre- and post-discussions, etc.

As we watched our students through the “lens” of our project focus, the ensuing professional dialogue regarding how these strategies “worked” or did not work for particular groups of boys sparked our motivation to continually adjust our planning.

Video tapes we made during literature conversation circles gave us a wealth of information. Many things we did not notice as active observers and facilitators became obvious when reviewed with colleagues or with tracking lists. For example, many conversations consistently began with the “more verbal” boys interacting with each other, but mid-point or later in the time given to these discussions, we began to observe less verbal and lower achieving boys adding comments that reflected a good understanding of relevant issues. We observed this activity repeatedly and began to ask ourselves why we were not seeing this “evidence” of understanding in other situations (e.g.; written responses).

We also used the video tapes to track how “higher level” questions facilitated deeper level responses and how the length of time allowed for conversations affected the frequency and level of “higher level” responses. Unfortunately, during the school renovation, many videos were lost or erased before we were able to analyze these observations in a systematic way.

Attitude Surveys, which we used to track several cohorts of boys also yielded information regarding our essential question. We examined both EQAO surveys and questionnaires.

At the end of the Year One, we administered surveys to staff. We also provided staff with regular time to “purposefully talk” about the project at staff and division meetings. Staff gave feedback for this Final Report in April of this year. This information was used by the school lead team in making decisions regarding the direction and “pacing” of in-house PD, etc.

Over the last several years, our board has begun using DATA DRIVEN. At the school level, we enter results for ON THE MARK reading level assessment in primary division and CASI reading assessment in junior and intermediate divisions. As mentioned earlier, our school is working to improve reliability of data and become more comfortable using a teacher moderation process; however, we examined this data carefully for trends across cohorts, across divisions, and with individual teachers’ results. More recently, we have begun using the data to purposefully “backwards plan” short term units which is giving us more immediate feedback about the success of our instructional practices (including purposeful talk strategies). Now that a majority of teachers have been trained to independently use DATA DRIVEN and examine results in it, we will continue to “grow” as a staff in making sense of data. We are in a much better place now to use this data in strategic ways to improve boys’ literacy rates than we ever have been as a staff.

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

EQAO Primary Boys — Student Questionnaire
Current grade. 7 boys' reading attitudes for “I Like to Read” reported at end of grade 3.

As you can see, the attitudes of our boys prior to the start of the project were less positive than those of the board or province.

More of our boys now have positive attitudes to reading than they did three years ago; that is, 20% more responded “Yes” and “Sometimes” to, “I Like to Read.” As well, the overall trend at Egremont is now reversed when compared with board and provincial data. The net difference is more like 30% because 10% fewer of the provincial boys’ cohort responded positively over the same time frame. These results concur with observations made by their teacher this year who reports that she has never had a group of boys more engaged or keen to read. “They love reading, not just traditional boy-friendly resources, but all kinds of narratives — even poetry!” Interestingly, grade 7 CASI and OWA data for this group shows little to no gender gap between these boys and their female classmates in both beginning- and mid-year assessments. This deviates significantly from our board’s trend in which the “gap widens” between girls and boys as they move through the junior and intermediate grades.

EQAO Junior Boys – Student Questionnaire
Current grade 7 boys’ reading attitudes for “I Like to Read.”

Current Grade 4 Cohort
Responses to question, “I enjoy reading at home” with “STRONGLY AGREE”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Beginning of year</th>
<th>End of year</th>
<th>% increase</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Grade 3 Students % Writing at Level 2  EQAO

Grade 3 Students % Writing at Level 3  EQAO

Current Grade 4 Cohort— % Achieving Benchmark End of Year Reading Level Using ON THE MARK

Grade 3 Students Writing at Levels 2 and 3 (see top two graphs at left)
Egremont had 12% more students achieving at Level 2 at the start of this project than our board. By the end of last year, we had reversed that trend with 2% less achieving at Level 2 for EQAO writing. This steady drop in percentages is reflected in the next graph where percentages of students achieving at Level 3 steadily increased over the same three years. Last year, we were 8% above the board and 9% above the province, a net gain of 11% and 10% respectively.

Last year, 67% of boys achieved at Level 3 or higher in writing on EQAO as compared to 70% of their female classmates.

Current Grade 5 Cohort (no graph)
In both the first and second year of the project, the results are the reverse of those for our board and the province. While in grade 3, 67% of boys vs. only 60% of girls achieved end of year benchmark reading levels according to ON THE MARK. Similarly, 73% of these boys scored at or above Level 3 on EQAO reading compared with 60% of the girls.

This trend continued in grade 4 where 63% of boys achieved standard on year-end CASI assessments vs. 60% of their female classmates.

End of year data for 2007/08 is not yet available for this cohort.

Current Grade 4 Cohort
(see graph above)
Before the project started, only 38% of the boys reached grade level at year-end. This jumped to 64% by the end of the first year of the project (grade 2) and 67% at the end of Year Two (grade 3).

In grade 4, we used CASI to assess reading levels. The board trend is a decline in “percentage achieving level 3 benchmark” in grade 4 (which we have attributed to the fact that CASI requires written responses to reading).

Yet 76% of these boys achieved level 3 on this test in term 3—a further 9% increase from grade 3 and a 38% increase from their pre-project levels three years prior.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

We opened our doors to our colleagues, our practices became more “transparent”, and we increased our comfort level in team teaching and peer observation. Because we worked on a common focus, our professional dialogue dramatically increased as we began moving from a collegial to a collaborative staff team.

The common language we developed for both our teaching staff and our students has had a significant impact. Teachers are delighted and relieved when incoming students arrive with the same base in abilities to state and follow norms for accountable talk, the discussion of books, and the use of purposeful talk strategies without extensive new teaching.

Many teachers reported that our professional book study caused a renewed energy in both their teaching and their commitment to reading of other professional texts and materials. Some teachers even offered that it has been the most professionally exciting and rewarding years of their careers. Others reported that they grew in their understanding of how to deliver curriculum in a systematic way as they focused more purposely on the planning, delivery, and assessment cycles with the support of their peers.

This project created a heightened awareness of the impact that teaching strategies can have on the quality of student responses. Many a success story was discussed around the staff room table as teachers shared with excitement an insight their boys had made that surprised them, or a strategy they had tried which had yielded interesting results. Many debates revolved around how well — at Egremont and in our school system at large — we were addressing many of the strategies in Me Read? No Way!

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
 audible.com (thousands of downloadable books — some read by authors) to use with MP3 players
Boldprint Series by Harcourt Canada

For professional development:
Knee-to-Knee, Eye-to-Eye  by Ardith Davis Cole
Building Comprehension Through Classroom Discussion — Scholastic Professional Series
Strategies that Work (2nd Edition) by Stephanie Harvey & Ann Goudvis
Reading for Meaning by Debbie Miller

Team Member Quote:
“It has been great to see students who had been achieving at Levels 1 and 2 improve their level of achievement simply by approaching the reading tasks from a variety of directions. For example, the opportunities to talk, to use audio books, and to work in dyads and triads helped us to better understand the meaning that boys were making from their reading.”

Administrator Quote:
“The Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry project has reinforced my belief that the greatest impact on student learning occurs when a group of educators become a team through a common sense of purpose. Having the opportunity to work through the inquiry process has provided staff, students, and our community with an unparalleled learning experience.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
purposeful talk; conversations; accountable talk; audible.com; MP3 players
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Holy Family — Kindergarten
Holy Name of Jesus — Kindergarten
St. Ann — Kindergarten
St. Brigid — Kindergarten
St. Columba — Kindergarten
St. Helen — Kindergarten
St. Lawrence — Kindergarten
St. Mary — Kindergarten
St. Patrick — Kindergarten
Dr. Nicholas Mancini Centre

Teacher Inquiry Team Members: 2007-2008
Luci Frosina — Kindergarten teacher
Anna Niewiadomski — Kindergarten teacher
Maria Daddato — Kindergarten teacher
Heather Chernets — Kindergarten teacher
Laura Therriault — Kindergarten teacher
Diana Rossini — Kindergarten teacher
Marina Bratetic — Kindergarten teacher
Catherine Colatosti — Kindergarten teacher
Susan Glenny — Kindergarten teacher
Frances Potter — Kindergarten teacher
Marion Kinsella — Kindergarten teacher
Isabelle Lanza — Reading Recovery and Language Resource teacher
Dorothy Spence — Principal: Special Project, Equal Opportunities Coordinator

Past Members
Barb Forsyth — Kindergarten teacher  Ann Marie — Kindergarten teacher
Karen Boitch — Kindergarten teacher  Maria Frixione — Kindergarten teacher
Janice Machado — Kindergarten teacher

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education

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Education
Essential Question: Can improving the oral literacy skills of Kindergarten boys in schools where poverty is endemic increase their reading scores at the end of their Kindergarten year?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Keep boys interested by choosing topics and resources that are of particular interest to them, especially non-fiction.

- Understand boys preferred learning styles:
  > provide lots of kinaesthetic activities;
  > avoid having them sit for too long; and
  > give them longer processing times to answer questions.

- Carefully consider data from the start of the Kindergarten year and use it as a springboard for discussion of strategic teaching practices.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

- Our daily practice was the Balanced Literacy Program with read aloud/think aloud, shared reading, guided talking and/or guided reading.
- We had the students spend less time “on the carpet” listening to “teacher talk”.
- We made literacy learning more active with hands-on activities and moved away from blackline masters and the “Crayola curriculum”.
- We worked on extending literacy into all centers.
- We attempted to engage students with authentic activities.
- We attempted to practice gradual release of responsibility to the student.
- We utilized S.M.A.R.T. goal setting.
- We used common assessment tools at designated times across all nine schools.
- At every meeting, we looked at and discussed the information from our Data Wall; that is, what was it telling us about the acquisition of literacy skills of our group as a whole and about boys as individuals?
- We made decisions about which students would benefit from additional tutoring.
- We used our assessment information to achieve greater precision in instruction.

Student Quotes:
“I love all my books. I love the pictures and the words.”
“Science makes you really, really smart.”
“I felt like I was nine years old.”
“I’m a good reader!”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Through the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board Task Force on Poverty, all nine of our schools were identified as serving extremely large populations of students whose families were living at or below the poverty line. In Hamilton, 25% of children under the age of 12 are living in poverty and 81% of them are in areas living within the catchment area of our nine schools. Research on poverty and education indicated to us that students living in poverty are much more likely to have up to two years delay in the acquisition of language skills. In looking at data from the 2004-05 school year and based on anecdotal evidence from teachers, we began to see a pattern of poor acquisition of literacy skills by Kindergarten boys in schools where poverty was endemic. After discussion and reading, we decided to determine whether improving the oral literacy skills of Kindergarten boys in our schools would improve reading scores at the end of the Kindergarten year. Our goal was to have 75% of our Kindergarten students reach PM Benchmark 5/6 by the end of Kindergarten.

We began by doing research on boys’ learning styles and interests in order to choose appropriate resources. This research included differences between girls and boys related to brain development, speech, and hearing. We consulted with our Board Speech and Language department. We then discussed how to collect data to measure results. During the three years of this project, we worked on such challenges as ensuring classrooms had enough materials and “the right stuff”. We met regularly every six to eight weeks for professional development and to discuss our progress and setbacks. During these meetings, we learned new things collegially and from visiting presenters. We also gathered assessment results, created and updated a Data Wall. The Data Wall has helped us to identify patterns and needs and to plan for the focus of our instruction and for professional development for the next gathering. As a group, we have incorporated a balanced literacy program into our classrooms to help improve boys’ literacy. We increased out-of-school learning activities and had eight sessions every year of Mad Science, which the boys loved. To help struggling students, we specifically used Activate Early Learning and Let’s Talk About It. Through using the Tutor in the Classroom support, we were able to target students who were not reaching the benchmarks and needed additional time and support.

By the end of our first year, 2005-06, the number of students reading at PM Benchmark 5/6 had increased from 22.4% to 40.6% and, by the end of our second year, we were absolutely delighted to see that the number had increased to 61%. We felt that even if we could match this number in 2007-08, the students would be well positioned for success in grade 1. Throughout the three years of the project, our group was remarkably cohesive despite a number of changes. We attribute this cohesion to regular meetings with supply coverage provided and clear, consistent, and meaningful agendas. We are committed to continuing our dialogue and have already begun to formulate our next question.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

Much of our effort focussed on the improvement of expressive language skills, but we need to look more intently at instructional strategies to improve receptive language skills. We are concerned about patterns of poor attendance and transience and need to examine these patterns more closely. As well, parent engagement in literacy remains a challenge.

These will be our next steps while continuing to monitor and maintain the gains we have made. We feel we need to continue the Professional Learning Community that has grown over the last three years and help our new Kindergarten teachers “get up to speed”. Mad Science has been very successful and should be continued. We have made progress in our schools despite the socio-economic challenges and we should congratulate ourselves for these gains. The needs of students in a school where poverty is endemic continue, and we realize we must keep the literacy skills of these students at the forefront.

Lastly, we want to work toward developing protocols for improving reading skills and target those students struggling in Kindergarten classes where poverty is endemic.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“For the first time my child said, ‘Reading is good because I can read by myself.’"
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Quantitative Data

The most useful quantitative data came from the following assessment tools:
- Observation Survey (Marie Clay)
- PM Benchmarks and Running Records
- Activate Early Learning (pre-and post-tests)

At every session, teachers brought along this data and used it to: (1) construct a profile of their class, and (2) construct a group Data Wall for all nine schools. As well, we analyzed this information by gender and compared the data to previous results.

The chart below is one example of the comparison data we collected. From this chart, we could see that boys were still lagging behind girls and would need additional support in Term 2. For the students as a whole, we could see that only 24% were achieving at a level they should be for this point in the school year.

<table>
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<th>Below PM Level 1</th>
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<th>Below PM Level 1</th>
<th>Below PM Level 1</th>
<th>Below PM Level 1</th>
<th>Below PM Level 1</th>
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<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>34</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

55.2% 20.9% 8.0% 16.0% 42.0% 20.5% 13.6% 23.9% 70.7% 21.3% 1.3% 6.7%

137 STUDENTS TOTAL 73 GIRLS 64 BOYS

Qualitative Data

The method we used for gathering qualitative data was teacher anecdotal notes about students and their learning. Much of this data was developed as we “drilled down” on what the numbers were really telling us about our students. In addition, at the end of every session, we completed individual evaluations of the session to determine how we needed to move forward on our path of teacher inquiry.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

PM Benchmark Reading Levels
As the graph below indicates, there was a steady increase in the overall number of students reading at PM Benchmark levels 5 and 6 from 22.4% in June of 2005, prior to the start of the project, to 40.6% in June of 2006, after Year One, and to 61% in June 2007, at the end of Year Two. Data for June at the end of Year Three is not yet available.

Legend:
- Level 1: Students scoring below PM Benchmark level 3
- Level 2: Students scoring at PM Benchmark levels 3-4
- Level 3: Students scoring at PM Benchmark levels 5-6
- Level 4: Students scoring at PM Benchmark above level 6

June 2005 Student scores prior to the beginning of the project.
June 2006 Student scores at the end of the first year of the project
June 2007 Student scores at the end of the second year of the project
June 2008 Not yet available
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Our data showed us that:

- valuable information about our students and their learning is provided by numbers, but it is important to ask lots of questions about the numbers;

- our strategies are increasing the number of students reading at PM Benchmark levels 5 and 6 by June;

- the information provided in Running Records reveals much about what an individual student has learned and what specifically we need to teach;

- a Data Wall can give us information about both the ‘big picture’ and the ‘little pictures’;

- we can compare half-day and full-day Kindergarten groups;

- we knew when boys made a big jump in their scores; and

- we must still pay attention to the differences between girls and boys.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

Most significantly, we learned that by meeting regularly and continuously and by adjusting our strategies in light of our results, we could make a difference in student performance.

One major highlight was finding out how much we could learn from our collective Data Wall. It generated endless points for discussion and it helped us determine our needs for additional professional development.

As we evolved into a fully functioning Professional Learning Community and met regularly, we were able to help one another focus our teaching. We moved from using our assessments mainly for reporting and measuring how well students were performing to using them much, much more to help us to decide what to teach, to whom, and what resources and strategies would be most effective.

Finally, working as a group of Kindergarten teachers who faced the same challenge of students living in poverty empowered us. We shared the things that brought us to tears and the things that made us smile. We feel that three strategies from Me Read? No Way!: (1) Have the Right Stuff!, (2) Teach with Purpose!, and (3) Let Them Talk! helped to keep us focussed, brought about change in our teaching practice s, and helped all our students living at or below the poverty line close the gap in the acquisition of literacy skills, especially the boys.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Rigby Activate Early Learning
Let’s Talk About It by C. Crevola and M. Vincis
Kindergarten Read Aloud Kit

For professional development:
Me Read? No Way! A Practical Guide to Improving Boys’ Literacy Skills — Ontario Ministry of Education
Guided Reading by I. Fountas and G. Pinnell
Letters, and Words and How They Work by G. Pinnell and I. Fountas

Team Member Quotes:
“The ongoing professional development and the collegial support have made me a better teacher.”
“Learning to read means learning to think.”

Administrator Quote:
“It is amazing what can be achieved despite the challenges of poverty, when a group of teachers has some specific funding, support, and leadership.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
Kindergarten; poverty; Data Wall; Balanced Literacy Program; kinaesthetic activities
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Greater Essex County District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
F.W. Begley Public School — Grades 5, 6, and 7
Eastwood Public School — Grade 3
Harrow Senior Public School — Grades 3 and 4
Kingsville Public School — Grades 2, 3, and 4
Lakeshore Discovery Public School — Grades 2, 3, and 4
Northwood Public School — Grade 8, JI Special Education

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Kelly Winney
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Danielle Mooney
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Paula Tulio
**Essential Question:** How does an intentional instructional focus on critical literacy affect boys’ literacy achievement?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

We found that carefully selected texts and classroom literacy activities provided opportunities for boys to demonstrate excellent thinking skills. It is important to select texts to which students can relate, allow multiple viewpoints, and, at times, challenge the status quo. Literacy activities that have an impact include think alouds, accountable talk, problem-posing questions, and action strategies that deepen thinking. We recommend action strategies such as role play, hot seat, choral montage, radio call in, and sculpture. Problem-posing questions established situations where students discussed significant issues to which they could relate. By providing opportunities for students to orally and actively demonstrate their thinking, the boys in our study were more engaged and better able to demonstrate their higher-order and critical thinking skills.

We found that boys’ thinking and literacy skills are not always evident in their written responses. Although DRA assessments showed an improvement, CASI and open-ended classroom written responses continued to be a challenge. Oral and written assessments of critical thinking skills using a common rubric showed different results. However, the use of sticky notes, anchor charts, and graphic organizers to record thinking did support some students in providing richer and more complex written responses. We found that boys are best able to demonstrate their critical thinking skills through oral assessments. Boys consistently demonstrated comprehension skills such as making connections, inferring, detecting bias, and examining multiple perspectives. Teachers observations also indicated that students were better able to express ideas and question, were more confident, and had broader reading interests (e.g., current events, new genres, and more challenging texts).

Some classes had student-initiated social action projects connected to texts/issues (e.g., a grade 2 class partnered with the Humane Society to rescue an animal and a grade 4 class initiated a school-wide environmental awareness project).

We learned that boys just learn differently. Boys would rather “do” than “write”.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

Boys are capable of demonstrating higher-order and critical thinking skills and being engaged when given opportunities to participate in action strategies and respond to problem-posing questions that create the space for them to think differently.

Boys enjoy being given a “voice” where there is no “right” answer and where their opinions/thoughts are valued.

We need to:
- select texts that are relevant to students (e.g., current events and social issues) and incorporate action strategies that authenticate learning (e.g., enactments and explorations of alternative perspectives);
- value students’ voices and allow them to direct instruction; and
- recognize that critical thinking cannot be assessed solely through written responses.

**Student Quote:**

“During stories, I actually feel like I’m inside the story. It opens up a whole new world for me.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Always keeping in mind our essential question, “How does an intentional instructional focus on critical literacy affect boys’ literacy achievement?” we focused our professional development on deepening our understanding of critical literacy in the classroom. Our first step was to become critically literate ourselves and this led us to professional readings such as Getting Beyond “ I Like the Book” by V. Vasquez and Critical Literacy: Enhancing Students’ Comprehension of Text by M. McLaughlin and G.L. DeVoogd and to developing classroom libraries with books such as Fly Away Home by E. Bunting. We also invited guest speakers such as author Vivian Vasquez and University of Windsor professor Tina Pugliese. We developed a partnership with Drama in Education and Community students from the University of Windsor. In addition, we scheduled monthly team meetings, which allowed us to reflect, dialogue, and share strategies gleaned from these professional learning opportunities.

In Year 2, our focus was to deepen our understanding of critical literacy and to collect classroom evidence of the impact of our instruction on student learning. We used teacher journals to collect qualitative data and reflect on our classroom instructional practices. We examined samples of student work, reading interests, attitude surveys, reading logs, and responses to texts to identify patterns and trends. These data highlighted the need to develop a common rubric to provide us with quantitative data for making comparisons. Our participation in the regional boys’ literacy conference where we shared our project work with other inquiry teams further highlighted that we needed to refine our data collection processes.

In Year 3, we recognized the importance of having a critical friend in our schools and each school team invited a colleague from their school to join their group. This built capacity at each school site.

As we became more intentional and precise in our instruction, we needed to assess the impact on boys’ literacy achievement. Our instruction focused on reading critical texts, engaging students in critical discussions, drama strategies, and making reading/writing connections. A day with Jeffrey Wilhelm, Action Strategies for Deepening Comprehension, provided us with key understandings that reinforced our instructional focus. Our collection of data also became more refined and focused. We each identified three boys in our classes to monitor. Our data collection included DRA and CASI administered in September and March, interviews conducted in September and March, scores collected monthly from critical literacy rubrics, and ongoing teacher observations.

We have gained new insights. We have learned how to challenge our students to think critically, how to incorporate drama, and to be aware of bias in lesson design. The engagement of our boys in literacy lessons reinforced our learning. We were

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

Based on our findings, we continue to wonder how best to bridge the obvious gap between oral and written responses. We continue to struggle to identify what assessment tools and strategies can effectively assess critical thinking and the “in-the-head” process.

To further build capacity, we need to continue our professional development through guest speakers, resources, and inservices. The establishment of Professional Learning Communities, site- or system-based, focused on our questions would help to continue our learning.

Some of our team members have shared their findings with colleagues at their school through workshops and/or book studies. Administrators continue to express an interest in having the learnings from this project shared at their schools.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“I can’t believe how much he is writing about books he reads! Can I photocopy his response to the book, Something Beautiful to show his Dad? I’m really excited about his progress!”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Qualitative Data
In the early stages of our project, our qualitative data tools included reading interest surveys, reading attitude surveys, reading logs, and teacher observation journals. As the project progressed, our focus on assessment became more refined. We maintained the use of teacher observations and conducted student interviews to collect additional data.

At monthly meetings, our dialogue focused on sharing our qualitative data including observations of student engagement and student responses connected to specific instructional strategies and texts. As a team, we identified and discussed trends and patterns in student learning. Our reflections helped to inform our next steps for classroom instruction. We each conducted fall and spring group interviews with the three boys selected for the study. The interviews provided insight into the students’ critical thinking and the impact of the instructional strategies on their learning.

Quantitative Data
The use of a rubric to assess students’ responses and individual report card marks for reading provided us with quantitative data in the early stages of our project. Our original rubric proved to be too broad in scope. As we became more critically literate, we narrowed the focus of our rubric to the achievement chart category “thinking”. This allowed us to closely examine students’ thinking skills (e.g., making inferences, detecting bias, and examining multiple perspectives). The primary use of our rubric was to assess written responses. Through discussions, we uncovered that these results did not always reflect what we believed students were capable of achieving. We noted that when we used the rubric to assess a written response and did a follow-up conversation with the student, achievement improved.

Results of our fall and spring system-wide assessments — DRA (for primary students) and CASI (for junior and intermediate students) — provided additional quantitative data.

Results
- DRA scores indicated an overall improvement.
- CASI scores indicated inconsistent results.
- Results for assessments of written responses using the rubric indicated improvement for several boys.

The results from DRA and CASI further support our initial observations. The DRA assessment focuses on decoding and oral sharing of comprehension, while the CASI assessment provides data based solely on written responses.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

We have learned that exploring critical texts through appropriate instructional strategies is powerful and engaging for students and enables them to think far beyond the literal meaning of texts. We have greater confidence broaching sensitive issues such as poverty, homelessness, gender stereotypes, and racism.

Over the three years, our monthly meetings were a highlight. The sharing of classroom stories, the moderation of marking student work, the introduction to new resources, the reflections on professional readings, and the participation in presentations of guest speakers have all been invaluable and helped us to maintain our focus on our essential question and the needs of the boys in our classrooms.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Texts that promote critical discussion such as Fly Away Home by Eve Bunting and The Table Where Rich People Sit by Byrd Baylor
Extensive classroom libraries that include graphic texts and magazines (e.g., OWL and Sports Illustrated for Kids)

For professional development:
Getting Beyond “I Like the Book” by Vivian Vasquez
Critical Literacy: Enhancing Students’ Comprehension of Text by Maureen McLaughlin and Glenn L. DeVoogd
Action Strategies for Deepening Comprehension by Jeffrey D. Wilhelm

Team Member Quote:

“The opportunity to grow and learn as professionals has been amazing. Sharing strategies and collaborating with other teachers was invaluable.”

Administrator Quote:

“Teachers’ involvement in this project had a positive direct and indirect impact on the quality of instruction delivered to all of our students — directly through their teaching and indirectly through PLC’s, book talks, staff room conversations, and sharing.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
critical literacy; action strategies; critical thinking; text selection; enagement
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Toronto Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Father Henry Carr — Grades 10, 11, and 12

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Steve Bottos
Sheila Gilkinson
Greg McGrade
Diane Visentin
**Essential Question:** Do graphic novels promote boys' literacy?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

By the conclusion of the boys' literacy project, our inquiry team had made four important discoveries; namely that:

- Boys scored significantly higher on assignments when using graphic texts compared with traditional novels.
- Boys are more engaged and therefore more likely to finish reading a graphic text compared with a traditional narrative.
- Boys are more likely to share their opinions and perspectives on graphic novels than traditional texts.
- When given a choice between a graphic novel and a traditional text, overwhelmingly, boys chose to read graphic texts.

**WHAT IMPACT DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT HAVE ON OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

Our inquiry project reaffirmed the belief of many members of our department that an important way to engage boys in reading written text is through the use of a visual stimulus. Once the boys were engaged in the reading, we were able to teach them challenging concepts. For example, the graphic texts *300* and *Fables and Reflections* helped students understand terminology such as hubris and hamartia. *Our Cancer Year* and *Epilepsy*, through illustrations, helped students understand procedures and medical practices unique to those particular diseases.

Since our goal was to engage boys in reading, most of the assignments we gave allowed them to choose the novels they read, which likely heightened their interest. Traditionally, students are given little choice in the books they read.

In some classes, students read books independently; however, in others, since they were not core texts, teachers arranged for students to read the same novels and discuss them in groups. In addition to the content quiz, in some courses, groups gave presentations about their book to the rest of the class.

**Student Quote:**

“I strongly agree that graphic novels aid in furthering the horizons of your imagination; they are useful to my learning because the more visually descriptive the story is, the easier it is to understand.”
**WHAT IS OUR STORY?**

The three year project began as an extension of the interest the lead teacher had in graphic texts. Steve Bottos had done some research on the use of graphic texts in teachers’ college and had begun to introduce them to a limited degree in his classes. The project provided the funding to expand the use and range of these texts to other courses and other teachers.

One challenge the three-year span of the project presented was the change in the make-up of the team that occurred when teachers joined the staff or transferred to other schools. Updating new members on what we had done and our goals were additional tasks. When teachers left, we missed having their experience and insight when reviewing our progress.

Another challenge was the timing of the funding. In the first year, we learned about the project in the fall, but were not able to begin until late into semester two, so we were not able to include as many students as we had hoped in our work. In the second year, it was unclear whether there would be additional funding, and indeed, we eventually learned there would not be. In the third year, we learned about additional funds in the late fall and thus did not get the additional texts until semester two. If we had known about the money the previous June, the extension of the project to grade 9 students could have been part of our planning for the upcoming year. Clearer communication about the funding timeline would have helped us bring the texts to the classroom more quickly and implement the project more effectively.

However, for the most part, the project went well because the essential question was clarified early on and did not need to be refined to a great degree. Since we had a clear focus, implementing the project went smoothly. Furthermore, the interest of the team members in the final results kept the project alive over what has been a lengthy period.

**WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?**

We would like to improve our teaching of graphic texts. As a department, we have a great deal of experience in teaching the techniques writers use to communicate meaning in traditional texts; however, we are still building our capacity to teach how this is done with graphic texts.

We would like to analyze data on graphic texts by genre to see which are the most successful in engaging students’ interests. We would also like to find more texts that appeal to females, essential/workplace students, and ESL students.

It would be interesting to see how effective graphic texts are when used with “at-risk” students only and do a study solely based on students who fit this criteria.

Finally, we would like to present our findings to our staff as an example of differentiated learning. Many of our students are visual learners and communicating the success of the project may lead other teachers to see the validity of incorporating graphic texts in other courses.

**Parent/Guardian Quote:**

"It was really surprising to see just how motivated my daughter was to read the graphic novels assigned to her. She is usually such a reluctant reader. When we went to Starbucks, she actually asked us to take her to Chapters so that she could look at the graphic novels and buy one on her own."
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

The results of this study, both quantitative and qualitative data, are based on the analysis and compilation of data for 187 boys over a three year period.

Test Results for Graphic Texts and Traditional Novels
We measured how boys scored on a test with twenty questions (five-option multiple choice) that we administered after the conclusion of work on both graphic texts and traditional novels. The tests were designed in a similar fashion using a mixture of recall, application, and analytical type questions. The difference in results between types of books is quite apparent:

Average for results on traditional novels = 12.02/20 = 60.0%
Average for results on graphic texts = 14.66/20 = 73.3%
Difference between types of text = 2.64/20 = 13.2%

Scores on Writing Assignments for Graphic Texts and Traditional Novels
Secondly, we measured how boys scored on writing assignments based on each type of text. The types of writing assignments used were personal reflections and creative pieces as well as tasks that required boys to connect concepts, ideas, and themes to personal experiences and contemporary society. The results indicate substantial differences in scores:

Average for results on traditional novels = 61.8%
Average for results on graphic texts = 71.2%
Difference between types of text = 9.4%

Rates of Assignment Submission for Graphic Texts and Traditional Novels
Furthermore, we also tabulated how often assignments were submitted by boys and how many tasks were not completed.

Percentage of writing assignments completed by boys on traditional novels = 66.3%
Percentage of writing assignments completed by boys on graphic texts = 79.4%
Difference between types of text = 13.1%

Scores on Essay Writing for Graphic Texts and Traditional Novels
Unfortunately, the results based on essay writing were not noticeably different as indicated below. Graphic novels do not compensate for the wide array of writing problems that students demonstrate on “formal” assignments.

Average scores on essays based on a graphic text = 60.3%
Average scores on essays based on traditional narratives = 61.4%
Difference between types of text = -1.1%

(Continued on next page)
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Rates of Essay Submission for Graphic Texts and Traditional Novels
We also tabulated how often essays were submitted by boys and how many tasks were not completed. As shown below, these results were more encouraging than the average marks for the essays:

Percentage of essays completed on graphic texts = 72.2%
Percentage of essays completed on traditional narratives = 63.4%
Difference between types of text = 8.8%

Summary Comments
One benefit that was apparent from the outset of this study was how engaged students were in discussions based on graphic texts. It took very little coaxing, whether in groups or as a class, to get students to discuss themes, issues, and specific content found in the illustrated novels. In fact, it was clear that students generally had their graphic texts read in order to actively join class and group discussions — this was not always the case with traditional novels.

The quality of connections made on graphic texts between themes in texts and issues in society was impressive but difficult to measure quantitatively.

We believe that one of the most compelling reasons to use graphic texts in courses is that students seem to enjoy them immensely. In fact, when one analyzes the boys’ top ten rated literary works for the three year study (see below), it is evident that nine of the highest rated are graphic texts. The only work on the list that is not a graphic text is To Kill A Mockingbird (ranked ninth). When learning is fun and interactive, boys are more motivated to embrace the tasks they are assigned.

Boys gave graphic novels an average rating of 7.41/10 on surveys administered at the end of courses. Traditional narratives such as To Kill A Mockingbird received an average rating of 7.22/10. There is a positive response by the student body, females included, when they see that the next work they will be reading is a graphic text. Even supply teachers often reported to us that students would sit quietly (on the whole) and do their assignment when reading a graphic novel.

The Top Ten Rated Novels — Boys’ Literacy Project
Based on a score of 1-10 (10 = most preferred; 1 = least preferred)

8.82 — Camelot 3000
8.69 — Grimm’s Fairy Tales
8.50 — Sandman: Fables and Reflections
8.33 — Maus
7.89 — Kingdom Come
7.77 — Persepolis
7.66 — Buddha – Volumes 1 and 2
7.51 — Pride of Baghdad
7.22 — To Kill a Mockingbird
7.21 — Fables: 1001 Tales of Snowfall

Conclusion
In conclusion, the results of our study indicate that students, when using graphic texts, will submit a higher percentage of assignments, score significantly higher on writing assignments that are not essay based, and will be more motivated (and engaged) readers.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

- We incorporated graphic texts into more of our courses. The project began with ENG 2P1 and ENG 2D1 classes, and was expanded to include Grade 9 Applied English and Grade 11 College English as well as Grade 11 Travel and Tourism.

- The project convinced more of our teachers of the validity of using graphic texts as classroom material.

- The use of graphic texts helped teachers who were attempting to differentiate materials to accommodate students' learning styles.

- Since the aim of our project was to increase student engagement, we encouraged teachers to allow students a stronger voice in choosing their texts.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
The following is a list of graphic texts that were reviewed favorably by our male students:

- 300, Sandman: Fables and Reflections, Runaways, Kingdome Come, Paul Has A Summer Job, Maus, Grimm’s Fairy Tales (volumes 1-3), Our Cancer Year, Mom’s Cancer, Epilepsy, The Crow, Buddha (volumes 1-3), Persepolis, Pride of Baghdad, and Camelot 3000.

For professional development:
Many web sites were instrumental in helping our research team select appropriate and engaging texts to use in this project.
Two of the most important web sites we used were:
http://graphicclassroom.blogspot.com/ and http://www.megacitycomics.co.uk
Others were: zenescope.com; silversnail.com; and beguiling.com

Team Member Quote:
“This semester, a male student in my Grade 10 Academic English class confessed that he hadn’t read a whole novel since grade 4. When given the choice to read a traditional text or a graphic novel for his independent study he pleaded to be given a particular graphic text and promised to read all of it. In the group discussion, he was animated and showed a good understanding of the text.”

Administrator Quote:
“This project has shown that graphic novels are more engaging for our male population and extends the traditional definition of reading to include this genre. Our English teachers have helped our males connect with reading, an activity which many of them found challenging or simply disliked. The graphic novel has allowed them to engage in discussion and become invested in the literacy process. We are encouraged by our results.” — M. Rossetti, Principal

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
graphic novels; visual stimulus; choice; engagement; writing assignments
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Durham Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Father Leo J. Austin — Grades 9, 10
St. Bernard — Grades 7, 8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Sue Clancy
Lorraine Ruscitti
Paul Frawley
Gillian Arlidge
Victoria Dyment
Essential Question:
Will guided reading and targeted instructional strategies make reading and writing relevant for a controlled group of boys who are in Levels 1 and 2, and in Applied and Locally Developed courses? Also, can guided reading and change in teacher practice improve student achievement levels in both reading and writing?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Good teaching, with a focus on targeted instructional practice benefits all students, not just boys.
- For optimal learning with boys, they need to be engaged by moving, reacting, and speaking out.
- Boys need to know *why* they’re doing something – practical aspect of an activity; it has to be authentic, and have a purpose.
- Boys are particularly interested in non-fiction.
- Boys want immediate feedback.
- Boys generally are more oral and hands-on than girls.
- Teachers have a new appreciation for boys' approach to literature. They observe that, emotionally, boys respond differently than girls — boys prefer direct, succinct answers; they don’t generally like the "touchy-feely" approach.
- Boys' answers generally are more condensed; they don’t tend to give a lot of supporting details
- However, with all these observations, teachers felt that boys are diverse; we can’t group them all together – there are differences among boys, just as there are differences between boys and girls

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

- Activities for boys have to be rich and hands-on.
- Boys' interest and learning accelerates with the use of drama and technology.
- Differentiated instruction applies particularly to boys – we need to allow students to choose ways to learn and to demonstrate what they have learned.
- We need to establish appropriate challenges for boys (and all our students).
- We learned the importance of variety in assessment, content, process, and product.
- Boys are motivated if we link learning to their interests and personal experiences.
- A focus on targeted instructional strategies improves learning for both boys and girls.
- We are more aware of the need for collecting and examining data to inform instruction and to review successful achievement of goals.
- We structure class assignments so they permit a range of responses.
- We assign activities geared to different learning styles, interests, and levels of thinking and achievement.
- We provide students with choices about what and how they learn.
- We are flexible. We move students in and out of groups based upon students’ instructional needs.

Student Quotes:
“At the beginning of the year I was shy and I never wanted to read anything in front of the class, but now I can read as well as my peers.”
“The main thing that I learned this year that really helped my reading was looking for answers inside the text. Before I’d get frustrated and stop reading. I’ve now learned that, usually, the answer or meaning for a sentence or word (or even paragraph) will eventually come.”
“Back in September I wasn’t really interested in reading often and now I read every night in my room as a hobby.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Initially, teachers wanted to improve boys’ attitude towards reading, but as they started working on the project, their goal evolved. They wanted not just to improve boys’ attitude, but to actually improve the boys’ achievement levels in reading and writing.

The group met frequently during the project to engage in professional development, examine student progress, share best practices, and next steps. In their classrooms, teachers focused on targeted instructional strategies — graphic organizers, post-it notes, read-aloud, inferencing, visualization, etc. These developed from our initial P.D. sessions, where teachers were engaged in a book study. They chose their favourite authors (e.g., Kylene Beers, Chris Tovani, David Booth) and employed selected instructional strategies in their classes. Several sessions also focused on the key points of boys’ literacy using *Me Read? No Way!* and current research. Teachers then applied this learning to their classrooms. Students were encouraged to connect their reading to real life situations and experiences, to provide a purpose for reading. Through this process, teachers made students aware of the metacognitive process to provide them with skills and strategies for use before, during, and after reading. Teachers also focused on offering materials in tune with the boys’ interests, and computer-related activities that appeal to boys.

Boys in the project were given choice in their selection of reading materials, and the teacher-librarians from both the secondary and elementary schools were instrumental in selecting and purchasing the materials and directing the readers. Students could select from the STAR reading materials, fiction, non-fiction, graphic novels, and comics. Boys from the elementary school (St. Bernard) were escorted over to the secondary school (Fr. Leo J. Austin) by the vice-principal, where they could peruse the books and do reading comprehension assessments on the STAR program. The students really enjoyed this transitioning piece, and felt it was a welcoming introduction to the high school.

Perhaps the most important piece of our project has been the relational aspect. Teachers of both panels commented on the relationships they have developed as a result of this project. Elementary teachers said that they no longer felt intimidated by the secondary school and appreciated the sharing of resources and insights from the secondary teachers. The project evolved into a reciprocal learning experience. Teachers involved went beyond the goals of the project — they shared curriculum, prioritized expectations, exchanged best practices, and engaged in community events together. Equally, secondary teachers came to a new understanding of the integral role elementary teachers play in a child’s development.

One secondary teacher remarked, “I’m totally impressed with elementary teachers — they’re concerned with the whole child, not just the content.” Teachers also commented, “I think my capacity to teach language has improved.” “The attitude towards reading has changed for all the students in my class.” In addition, other teachers in both the elementary and secondary schools have asked to attend some of our sessions, and teachers involved in the project are sharing their learning with other classroom teachers.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

We would like to continue the teacher inquiry model by involving more teachers and other elementary schools within this family of schools. We have also had a TLLP proposal accepted to extend the project to another secondary school and their elementary schools. We want to build capacity by having some of the teachers and teacher-librarians involved in this project work with the new family of schools in providing professional development for other teachers.

Teachers would like to have all students in the class involved in the next steps of the project, although data would be collected only for the boys. As they discovered, targeted instructional practices benefit all students. Girls in the classes commented, “They bought graphic comics for the boys, but we like them too.” Teachers would also like to have more visits and exchanges between the elementary and secondary schools, with the entire class participating.

In continuing the model we have started, teachers would like to place additional focus on these areas of boys’ literacy:
- Boys’ literacy and the use of technology
- Archetypes for boys in media
- Drama and boys’ literacy

Parent/Guardian Quotes:
“‘The literacy strategies put in place for boys have also benefited my daughter.’”

“I really want to see kids read and enjoy it.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Teachers are now more aware of the need for collecting and examining data, and data results are shared and discussed with colleagues. Data is being used to focus targets in planning and to review successful achievement of goals. Teachers are using a design-down approach to assessment, with a focus on “assessment for learning.”

We collected qualitative data through:
- Portfolios of student work
- Student records
- Teacher notes, checklists, journals of observations
- Formal and informal interviews, conversations with students - notes taken by teacher
- Attitudinal surveys administered at beginning and end of year
- Interest inventories

Through this data collection, we have been able to determine that, overall, the boys’ attitudes towards reading have improved. The boys now see themselves as readers. They see the importance of reading in their lives, and are able to articulate their reading preferences. This project has allowed us to focus on a successful transition for these students from grade 8 to grade 9.

We collected quantitative data through:
- Diagnostic tests
- Formative, summative tests
- Self/peer assessments
- Attendance records
- Report cards - academic achievement, learning skills, teacher comments
- Standardized tests - results of grade 6 EQAO, grade 10 OSSLT
- Administration of CASI board-wide

CASI attitudinal surveys done at beginning and end of year indicated that, overall, boys’ attitudes towards reading have changed.

In line with our schools’ goals, students’ level of achievement, as assessed by CASI, improved in the area of organization (connections, main idea, inferencing, identifying features of text).

In grade 7, 25 students were achieving at/above grade level in October. By April/May 2007, 52 students were at/above grade level, as assessed by CASI (68%).

In grade 8, 33 students were achieving at/above grade level in October. By April/May 2007, 51 students were at/above grade level, as assessed by CASI (59%).

At the time of this report, we have not done the final CASI assessments for 2008 (grades 7/8).

We also do not yet have the results of the OSSLT testing for March, 2008 (grades 9/10).
**FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?**

Of the students who were tracked in secondary, all but one has passed English. Although it was the recommendation of the grade 8 classroom teachers for these students to enroll in Applied or Locally Developed Classes at the secondary level, several did opt for Academic English. The chart below shows the results:

![Chart showing English marks for different grades and classes](image)

Below are the English marks for 2008 for students who were tracked who began the program in grades 7 and 8:

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Mark (English)</th>
<th>Mid-term</th>
<th>Final</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>60</td>
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<td>63</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 9 Applied</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 10 Academic</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>57</td>
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<tr>
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<td>52</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Overall, an analysis of student work shows that the boys are applying the reading skills being taught – analyzing, predicting, inferring, making connections, etc. They are able to use both information from the text and from their background knowledge in applying these skills.

Student anecdotal summaries also indicated that students were cognizant of the metacognition processes involved in reading. Students were able to identify strategies that were successful for them, and were able to articulate their progress in reading. They also enjoyed the choice in reading materials, and were able to make connections — text to text, text to self, and text to world. They could articulate the importance of being a good reader. They knew what strategies were successful for them and made suggestions about the type of reading materials to add to the program. Overall, the boys felt they had become better readers in the past few years. Students who were initially resistant to participating in the group said they could read “a bit faster”. In their interviews and surveys, students felt they were better readers because they’re “more mature” and “visualize everything now and that helps (them) to understand.”

In terms of sustainability, we need to focus more on tracking the students once they make the transition to secondary, ensuring that students’ English courses are with a teacher from the group who has worked on the focused instructional strategies. To this end, we need to bring more staff on board and provide additional outside sources for professional development.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

We felt that the growth and development of the group was the highlight of our work on this inquiry project. Through the project, teachers were given the opportunity for self-directed professional development. They were able to read current research on boys’ literacy, brain research, assessment, and best practices. Teachers felt they developed a heightened sense of community and involvement through their work with this group. They were keen to share each others’ interests and to discover more about their colleagues.

In their practice, they were extremely pleased with their increased awareness of students’ needs and learning styles. They felt that they had refined their teaching practice through the focus on using data to inform instruction, the use of varied and ongoing assessments, and focused instructional strategies. Teachers expressed the fact that there was more transparency in their teaching, and that they felt a sense of accountability. They also felt that they were involved in the metacognitive process along with the students, so that they were continually assessing and reflecting on their learning.

All teachers expressed an interest in continuing with the project, and found it a very positive experience.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Boldprint series
Timeline series
Graphic novels
Comic books
Magazines       Adventure stories       Drama Education and Theatre resources
For professional development:
Beers, Kylene.  When Kids Can't Read: What Teachers Can Do.
Booth, David.  Even Hockey Players Read: Boys, Literacy and Learning.
Booth, David, Green, Joan, & Booth, Jack.  I Want to Read!: Reading, Writing, & Really Learning.
Franco, Betsy.  (Ed.) You Hear Me?: Poems and Writing by Teenage Boys.
Smith, Michael, & Wilheim, Jeffrey D.  Reading Don't Fix No Chevys.       Tovani, Chris.  Do I Really Have to Teach Reading?

Team Member Quote:
“This is the best professional development group I’ve ever been involved in. I really feel I’ve learned something and I can share this with my colleagues and my own children.”

Administrator Quote:
“This process was an excellent opportunity for staff at both schools to collaborate and learn together. The data collection and analysis component, as well as the focus on differentiated instruction and targeting instructional strategies, were especially helpful.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
community, interactive, relational, affirmative, inspiring, non-threatening
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Lakehead District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Five Mile School — Grades 3-8
Gorham and Ware School — Grades 3-8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Carey Mossman (2007-08)
Allison Chambers (2005-08)
Michele Liedke (2005-08)
**Essential Question:** Will boys’ reading increase with the daily use of active, brain compatible learning strategies and will the use of these strategies increase boys’ achievement levels in reading?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Students who were unable to complete Brain Gym activities (e.g., cross crawls and hookups) had lower reading achievement levels (comprehension and decoding) than those who could.

- Hands-on literacy games (e.g., Scrabble, Upwords, Word Chunk Game, Word Tiles Similies, Word Tiles Synonyms, Word Tiles Prefix and Suffix, Word Tiles Antonym, Stamp & Write 3 levels, Magnetic Sight Words, Word Family Linking Cubes, Building Words Linking Cubes, Sentence Building Linking Cubes, and Tub ‘O Sight Words 3 levels) give students opportunities to network with other students through literacy and gives students opportunities to physically move.

- It is important to provide ample book selections geared to student interests (comics; adventure stories; graphic novels; mysteries; joke books; magazines that include sports, hunting, fishing; and science non-fiction books).

- Students should be provided with opportunities for movement in all curriculum areas, not just Physical Education.

- Boys are aware of the books they want to read and are able to select them, if available.

- To promote reading, it is essential to have well stocked classroom libraries.

- Non-traditional reading materials must be included in classroom and school libraries (comics; graphic novels; joke books; magazines that include hunting, fishing, dirt biking, etc.; and non-fiction titles).

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

- We included word games as word study instead of using just pencil-and-paper work.

- We built in movement during instruction and/or follow-up activities.

- We built in more time for practice (e.g., suffixes and compound words) prior to summative assessments.

- We gave assessments that could be done with hands-on materials (performance tasks) as well as with pencil-and-paper and used more differentiated teaching and assessment strategies with boys (say, write, do).

- We became aware that boys learn in a different, kinesthetic way and provided materials to meet their needs.

- We paid attention to reading logs, student discussions, and books that students brought to class.

- We assessed student achievement using their preferred reading materials (e.g., non-fiction and graphic novels).

**Student Quote:**
“I am more fluent with words when I play word games.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

One of the major highlights of our project was the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues from both school sites. We were discovering how boys learn and how we, as teachers, could best meet their educational needs. Two of our team members were invited to present our project at the NOEL Conference, held in the summer of 2007. This was an exciting opportunity to share some of our findings with other teachers around Northwestern Ontario.

We began to realize that boys need to move during the learning process and we began to incorporate opportunities to move in our daily lessons. We discovered that our boys — those at the both the junior and intermediate levels — enjoyed using hands-on manipulatives during literacy activities. We also observed rich oral discussions during these activities.

One of our major challenges was the number of other programs initiated by our board and the ministry over the time of this project, namely Daily Physical Activity, Professional Learning Communities (PLC), Good Readers’ Club, and Differentiated Instruction. Teachers felt overwhelmed with all the new initiatives, in addition to addressing a full curriculum.

Because our schools are twinned, we experienced several changes in administration as well as some changes in teaching staff. This meant that some staff members were not fully trained in Brain Gym or the use of some of the manipulatives. This made the implementation of our project difficult. As well, when the project began, we did not consult with many teachers in the writing of the essential question and, consequently, many did not “buy into” the concept of Brain Gym or did not wish to be involved in the project. Many teachers and intermediate students had different comfort levels when doing the physical aspects of Brain Gym. Some teachers also indicated in the surveys that the project may have been too long and suggested that two years may have been more manageable given all the staff and administrative changes.

For those teachers who utilized the Brain Gym activities and implemented differentiated instruction, it was a beneficial learning experience and has changed the way we view boys’ literacy.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

- We will continue to supplement our classroom and school libraries with books for boys.
- We will encourage parents to talk to their children about what they want to read and to provide them with the books they enjoy.
- We will continue to have discussions at staff meetings and PLC’s about strategies to improve boys’ literacy and promote the use of literacy manipulatives.
- We will continue to provide books to parents on a sign-out basis to promote literacy at home.
- If the opportunity arises, we will share what we have learned through this project with other teachers.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“I have noticed my son reading at home more often. now that I have bought the Bone series.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Qualitative Data
Our qualitative data was primarily generated from surveys. In our first year, we gathered survey data from students, teachers, and parents about reading preferences, frequency of reading, locations where students like to read, what manipulatives they enjoyed using, as well as attitudes toward reading. We correlated the survey data to determine if there were any discrepancies between the response groups and found there were more discrepancies between the students’ and their parents’ perceptions about reading. This information addressed our essential question, which was about reading frequency and the use of manipulatives as a reading aid.

Other sources of qualitative data were Reading Logs and Reading Response Journals. These gave us information about reading preferences, patterns, and which books were abandoned and why. The collection of this data was a challenge because the boys were reluctant to complete the logs — they preferred to do oral presentations and were not interested in tracking their reading.

Our observations of student behaviour gave us additional qualitative data. We observed that boys preferred to either talk about their books in the form of book talks and oral presentations or present their stories in a creative way (e.g., skits, dioramas, and videos). We also observed that students enjoyed hands-on literacy games such as Scrabble, Upwords, and Boggle because they perceived the games as assessment-free activities.

Quantitative Data
To begin, we gathered our quantitative data from the Flynt-Cooter Reading Assessment for junior grades and the DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment) for primary grades. Due to board-directed changes, we added the DRA in the third year of the project. We decided to change our source of quantitative data to the Trillium data which is based on report card data. This gave us consistent data for reading achievement over the three years of the project.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

The bar graphs show the changes in levels of reading achievement at Five Mile School and Gorham and Ware School. There is a decrease in the percentage of male students reading at Levels 1 and 2 at both schools and an increase in the percentage of male students achieving at Levels 3 and 4.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Five Mile School

Gorham and Ware School
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

We have become more aware of the need to track student achievement in literacy. We now regularly update a reading progress chart at staff meetings. It is very exciting to see students move along the board from level to level.

We examine data from the Trillium program that relates to literacy skills and look for patterns in student achievement. We collaborate and share strategies we need to put in place to support students who are achieving below Level 3.

We have explored the characteristics of a Level 3 reader for each grade. We recognize the need to become aware of, not only our own students’ abilities, but also the abilities of students at other grade levels. The data provided by the DRA as well as qualitative, observational data guides our instructional strategies.

The project has made us more aware of data and the types of data that are available (e.g., surveys, observations and interviews) to drive instruction.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- Bone (graphic novel) by Jeff Smith
- Leap Pad Learning System — Interactive Books
- Island, Everest, Dive (adventure novel series) by Gordon Korman
- Pirateology: The Pirate Hunter’s Companion by William Captain Lubber and Dugald A. Steer

For professional development:
- Even Hockey Players Read: Boys’ Literacy and Learning by David Booth
- Teachers, Change Your Bait! by Martha Kaufeldt

Team Member Quote:
“The need for physical movement during literacy activities addresses the needs of those students who may have previously fallen through the cracks. Being able to move as a part of the educational day has actually helped these students toward whole-brain learning.”

Administrator Quote:
“It was very interesting to work with the team members who were with the project for the entire three years.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
Brain Gym; boys’ literacy; brain compatible; differentiated learning; movement
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Hastings Prince Edward District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Foxboro Public School – Grades 3, 6, and 8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Lorna Hanrahan
Julie LeSage
Nicole LeSage
Justin Shakell
Karen Valentine
Essential Question: What are the common reading and writing instructional practices for improving boys’ written communication, specifically in the following areas: details, organization, voice, and

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

Collaboration and teacher moderation enable a PLC to establish common assessments and practices and a shared vision related to student achievement. Data (strengths, weaknesses, and next steps) drives instruction.

Conferencing and providing feedback to students, specifically articulating the SINGLE next step to move a student forward, has the greatest impact on student performance. Taking time to talk with students and assist them to articulate their next step builds the metacognition component of student achievement.

The reading-writing connection (i.e., shared reading lessons that address both reading and writing skills, while providing a model text for the written summative task) allows teachers to “double dip”, while further building on student understanding and application of skills.

Common frameworks for writing tasks and reading open response questions builds common understanding of exemplary work, common strategies to teach the “how to’s”, and purposeful and precise professional dialogue. Include students in the inquiry process in order to build ownership and increase motivation. Consider their opinions re: the gender gap, what motivates them, and celebrate with them when targets are met.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

While we may have slightly revised our essential question from year to year, our process remained very similar over the course of our project. Our essential question kept the “end in mind” for us, while the process (our assessment and instructional practices) provided us with the short term goals and next steps to move our team forward. We used the following process to structure our inquiry: (1) Select and develop summative task, exemplar, and rubric, (2) Develop lessons (two-week block) and open response reading questions that specifically address necessary skills for summative reading/writing task, (3) Conduct teacher moderation for summative task, (4) Select a “next step” for each student, (5) Analyse data for patterns and develop lessons to address students’ weaknesses and/or next steps, and (6) Select next summative task. Overall, our instructional and assessment practices have become more immediate (based on student needs) and refined.

Student Quote:
“ I am a better writer than I was. We get a model, we have a format to follow, it makes it clear. The stuff we used to do was more feminine, like we would write stuff that guys aren’t interested in. We’ve moved away from, “What did you do on your Holidays?” – thank goodness.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Prior to the boys' literacy project, our boys were doing well in reading and math, and yet struggling in writing. We began our project by “talking to the boys”, asking them what they thought was the cause of the discrepancy, and where they thought we should begin. They wanted “boy friendly topics”, a clear outline of what is expected (an exemplar), a shorter writing process, and they wanted us to “lighten up on all the things they had to fix after they had finished” (i.e., they wanted just one next step).

For the first two years, we followed the same process: (1) collaborating on the development of a summative task, (2) marking the pieces of work collectively (teacher moderation), (3) selecting a “next step” for each student, (4) analysing the data for patterns (to determine next steps for teaching), and (5) choosing another summative task. By following this process, our team was able to address the immediate needs of our students. Additionally, our team developed a shared understanding of (1) how to teach writing (i.e., breaking the process down into a skill set) and (2) the achievement levels, thus making our teaching and expectations consistent from grade to grade.

By Year Three, our team was feeling quite smug. We felt secure with our process and felt we had a good understanding of boys’ writing. However, in Year Three, we had our lowest EQAO scores ever. Looking back, our mistakes seem obvious (don’t they always!). First, we had a significant staff turnover ~ one change in administration and three new EQAO teachers. Second, the number of students with IEPs was quite large in comparison to past years. Our error was in beginning where we left off in Year Two. We should have gone back to the very beginning. We were ignoring our own “next steps”! Our starting point should have been in reading, as many students did not have basic comprehension skills (which directly impacts on writing skills).

In this final year of our project, we are blending the best of Year One and Year Two with the “should haves” of

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

For the past four years, we have been fortunate to learn from the expertise of our colleagues in a PLC setting. In each PLC, we have drawn on the strengths and the expertise of our colleagues and brainstormed how to best teach literacy skills to our boys.

Our future plans are to continue the PLC’s with those teachers interested in participating. Also, we want to provide staff members with more consistent updates regarding the PLC groups – what’s working and what is not. We are developing a student writing exemplar binder for teachers to use as model texts to more clearly demonstrate what is expected of students.

Finally, we would like to see increased student involvement in the self-assessment component of literacy.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“My child has learned to organize and condense thoughts, to develop ideas, to select rich words, and to proofread. The quality of my child’s reading and writing has greatly improved, thanks to the instruction of the classroom teacher.
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?
DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

**EQAO DATA - OVERALL**

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<th>Grade 3</th>
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<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>2003-04</td>
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<td>2004-05</td>
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<td>2005-06</td>
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<td>2006-07</td>
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<td>50</td>
<td>2006-07</td>
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<td>35</td>
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**Gender Data**

**Grade 3**

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<td>Reading</td>
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<td>Mathematics</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
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**Grade 6**

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<td>Reading</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
## FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

### Grade 3 Boys

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Started teacher moderation in PLC setting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>85</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Focused on writing. <strong>Why boys improved in writing:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>44</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Why boys did not improve in reading and writing:</strong></td>
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### Grade 6 Boys

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<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Girls' achieved 84% in writing - clear evidence of a gender gap.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>59</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Boys improved in writing because of:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
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<td>62</td>
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<td><strong>Writing stabilized because of:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Why boys did not improve in both reading and writing</strong></td>
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teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca  
This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

EQAO 2007-08 Results

- Grade 3 Reading – 76% of boys achieved at or above the provincial standard
- Grade 3 Writing – 65% of boys achieved at or above the provincial standard
- Grade 6 Reading – 84% of boys achieved at or above the provincial standard
- Grade 6 Writing – 79% of boys achieved at or above the provincial standard

These data represent significant improvements in boys’ achievement in reading and writing.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

As a team of educators, we have changed. We are more focussed, more specific, and more driven by the needs of our students. Without doubt, coming together in a PLC can be somewhat risky - you put yourself out there for all to see - what you know, what you think you know, and your struggles. Our team has put “the ego” aside...usually. We have worked together to analyse strengths, weaknesses and, most importantly, next steps.

We have developed a respect for data to determine where we should focus our attention. When we ignored last year’s September reading data, we played catch-up for the year. This year, we used the EQAO individual question data as a starting point to determine strengths and weaknesses.

There are so many things teachers can do and so many commercial products and resources educators can use. We will continue our goal, which is to focus on the very best next step, based on school data.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Geronimo Stilton Series
The Wide Side Series - Jamestown Publisher
Critical Reading Series - Jamestown Publisher
Castle Diary - The Journal of Tobias Burgess by Richard Platt

For professional development:
EQAO exemplars
CASI
Harcourt Reading Assessment

Team Member Quote:
“This experience has enriched and focussed my teaching through collaboration with colleagues and in-depth analysis of student work. Using EQAO exemplars as a guide for instruction has enabled students to become actively involved in their own learning. This process has validated both students and teachers.”

Administrator Quote:
“Working with groups of teachers -- brainstorming, planning, arguing, and celebrating is the basis for moving students forward. Sharing expertise and focussing on specific next steps is the key.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
boys’ writing; student feedback; frameworks; connections; teacher moderation

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
Final School Report: 2008
Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Toronto District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
George B. Little Public School — Grades 2 – 6

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Laurie Lee-Neal
Bridget Stevens
Erika Jander
Helen Maragos
Mary Niarchos
Diana Rankin

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
Essential Question:
Will the DRA, CASI, and ultimately the EQAO scores of our male students improve after increased exposure to appropriate classroom resources?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

Resources
- Have high-interest books available, especially graphic novels and sports-related texts.
- Use these resources throughout the day in various reading/writing activities.

Staff
- Foster motivation through book talks, read-alouds, literature circles, guided reading, and Boys' Reading Clubs.
- Develop professional discussion groups with grade/division partners and cross-divisional colleagues to develop understanding of boys' learning styles.
- Dedicate time in the students' schedules for all types of reading – modeled, shared, guided, and independent.

Students
- Require continued instruction in choosing appropriate reading materials.
- Use differentiated instruction to address all learning styles.
- Encourage greater participation in Boys' Reading Clubs and arrange Reading Buddies with different grade partners.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?
- We acquired and used resources that interested the boys and helped them to focus during instructional time. We also encouraged boys' independent reading through the use of appropriate resources and exposure to a variety of literature.
- We focused more on explicit instruction; that is, teaching and modeling characteristics of book texts to increase students' abilities to respond to texts using text to self, text to world, and text to text connections.
- We taught and modeled connections between books and writing so students were better able to produce written passages in a variety of genres.
- We used additional resources, which resulted in improved written responses. We taught writing “formulas” that helped boys make text connections to the world and their own experiences.
- We used and followed First Steps for Writing strategies.
- We allowed boys more time to discuss various texts with partners.
- We made better use of anecdotal notes, individual conferences with students, book talks, and CASI and DRA data tracking.

Student Quote:
“When I’m reading, I feel like I’m actually in the book imagining what’s happening in the story by the dialect and text written.” — Student, Age 13

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

When we began this inquiry project, we wanted to increase the amount of classroom resources for our students. Specifically, we felt we had sufficient resources for general teaching, but we did not have resources to engage male readers in independent reading activities. We began our inquiry by surveying the boys in our school. We needed to find out the types of books that would interest them so we could motivate them to read more often and with purpose. From the results of this survey, resources were purchased that focused on a specific list of genres. These included the following genres of books: comics/graphic novels, jokes or riddles, picture books, adventure stories, magazines, biographies, and mysteries.

Our next step was to decide how to use the newly purchased resources. Since the purpose of our inquiry was to determine whether resources made a difference to boys’ achievements, we enriched the reading resources for some classes, while in others we maintained the resources the classroom already had. In order to monitor the progress of the inquiry, resources were distributed to classes in grades 3, 4/5, and 6, for which teachers were part of the inquiry team.

Finally, we needed to determine the teaching strategies we would use. We wanted to ensure that we were using the same instructional strategies and activities to enrich learning in each grade class. We met to determine the needs of the students and based our decisions on DRA and CASI scores. We then implemented similar strategies in our classrooms. The strategies we focused on were:

- comprehension;
- making connections with text; and
- making inferences based on text content and features.

During the length of the inquiry, we met to discuss how the students were responding to our teaching strategies. We also discussed how the students were interacting with the classroom library that was now more engaging and inviting due to the additional resources. It was evident that the boys were practicing reading skills independently. The teachers also began to use the inquiry project books to model lessons, give book talks, and conduct literature circles; and, by doing so, it helped to review the classroom library with students, gain the interest of the boys, and engage the boys more in classroom discussions.

Overall we feel this has been a helpful experience because we were able to explore how resources make a difference in the attitudes and willingness of boys to engage in books.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

- We will continue our discussion of best practices for the development of reading skills throughout the school.
- In divisional meetings, we will focus on teaching strategies, develop teams, and have enriched conversations about teaching with a focus on student learning.
- We will explore Media Literacy to address Boys’ overall literacy needs and further interest them in the development of language skills.
- We will increase community and family involvement in developing language skills through events such as Teddy Bear Picnic, MS Read-a-thon, Blue Spruce, Silver Birch, and Red Maple.
- We will access community programs like Reading for Raptors.
- We will continue to build and maintain the school bookrooms and classroom libraries to further develop students’ language skills, interests, and desires to engage in various literacy activities, especially for the boys.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Quantitative Data

Percentage of boys who scored level 3 or 4 on DRA or CASI:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>78%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>79%</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>47%</td>
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Percentage of boys who scored level 3 or higher in reading on EQAO:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>52%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>55%</td>
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Qualitative Data

We gathered qualitative data from a variety of sources:

- Student questionnaires to determine boys’ reading attitudes and preferences at the beginning and end of the project.
- Teacher questionnaires to determine the genres, type of text, and instructional strategies regularly used in classrooms.
- Teachers recorded anecdotal observations of the reading preferences and practices of the students in their classes.

The results of the student questionnaires administered at the start of the inquiry project indicated that boys preferred the following genres of books: comics/graphic novels, jokes or riddles, picture books, adventure stories, magazines, biographies, and mysteries. When the questionnaires were repeated at the end of the project, the preferences remained the same. Within the various genres, the boys most liked stories about heroes, animals, sports, war, and technology.

The results of the teacher questionnaires indicated that the types of texts teachers were using to deliver curriculum to their classes changed. Prior to this inquiry project, teachers relied heavily on narratives, novels, and text books. Now there is a greater variety of texts used to deliver curriculum in our school.

Teachers involved in the inquiry noted an increase in the amount of time boys were engaged in reading.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

During this inquiry, we engaged in a great deal of discussion about how best to use the resources we had purchased. We placed the resources in three specific classrooms for the 2006-07 year and continued in the same classrooms for 2007-08. While the resources were available to other classes for use, the boys from each of these three classrooms were the ones that were the focus of our inquiry.

Our initial sample consisted of boys in grade 3 (16 students), grade 4 (25 students), and grade 6 (29 students). Our task was to compare improvement in the results of boys in these three classrooms over the 2005-06, 2006-07, and 2007-08 school years and we are particularly pleased with the results.

Our quantitative data showed:

- In 2005, 52% of the boys in grade 3 achieved Level 3 or 4 on DRA. In 2006, in the same classroom, 65% of the boys achieved Level 3 or 4 on DRA and, in 2007, 79% of the boys achieved Level 3 or 4.
- In 2005, 13% of the boys in grade 4 achieved Level 3 or 4 on CASI. In 2006, in the same classroom, 16% of the boys achieved Level 3 or 4 on CASI and, in 2007, 44% of the boys achieved Level 3 or 4.
- In 2005, 12% of the boys in grade 6 achieved Level 3 or 4 on CASI. In 2006, in the same classroom, 27% of the boys achieved Level 3 or 4 on CASI and, in 2007, 47% of the boys achieved Level 3 or 4.

In these three classrooms, 27% more boys achieved at Level 3 or 4 in the grade 3 class over three years; 31% more boys achieved at Level 3 or 4 in the grade 4 classroom, and 35% more boys achieved at Level 3 or 4 in the grade 6 classroom. These three classrooms were exposed to the additional resources and the teachers received training provided by our Professional Learning Community.

Our qualitative data showed:

Our qualitative data also supported the improvement in the classrooms. This inquiry project supported us in our journey towards developing school discussions on the learning needs of our students. We began looking at data differently to explore the gaps in achievement for our male students. We developed a list of teaching strategies we believed boys responded to positively and further enhanced their interest in learning. These included:

- Teach specific text features, especially non-fiction, since many boys like this type of text. Ensure that direct teaching is also used to teach some fictional text, since boys, in general, do not prefer this genre.
- Use resources that have realistic photos rather than illustrations. Boys respond better in class discussions when the images are real instead of artistic impressions drawn by artists.
- Teach boys how to respond to text using a specific formula – restate the question, answer the question, give support, and then extend your response. This strategy adds significantly to the quality and length of boys' responses in daily work.
- Teach perspective in reading. When “voice” is considered as a feature to develop viewpoint, boys engage better in classroom discussions about reading.
- Encourage boys to make connections and teach them how to make inferences. (Although our team did not specifically initiate this strategy school-wide, the resources the inquiry project provided greatly increased the engagement and motivation of our male students. Our boys were better prepared to think about the main idea in texts and to respond to literacy using text to self, text to text, and text to world connections.)

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

- Teach students how to choose the right reading material and teach them specific strategies for choosing reading material at their own level. (We found that our male students were able to choose genres they enjoyed reading, but they were often choosing material that was too difficult. This made a difference in the length of time a boy took to read and re-read a book.)

- Use a variety of text to deliver programs. (As the type of resources available in the classrooms changed, our teachers began to look for different types of literature to use in teaching. For example, in the beginning, we found that the majority of texts used for teaching was narrative or textbook related. Later, teachers began using alternative texts to assist in teaching; for example, newspapers, Internet blogs, and other non-fiction texts.)
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

We have assessed our successes and our future challenges. As a team, we feel we were successful in helping boys become more aware of text and they were more motivated to engage in reading activities and discussions.

Our latest discovery has been the value of Professional Learning Communities. They have helped to focus staff and provide opportunities for professional dialogue in order to improve overall student success.

One of the challenges we continue to have is obtaining multiple copies of high-interest books for boys to meet classroom demand. We also recognize that the key resources purchased throughout this inquiry project should be available in all classrooms. A second challenge is to continue to enhance our team approach in teaching so that we can better share resources, discuss best practices, and develop both division and school-wide objectives for student success.

In moving forward with this inquiry project, we have two new questions:

- How do we further develop family and community involvement to foster real world connections in literacy for boys?
- How can we further use Media Literacy as a tool to address boys' overall literacy interests?

Finally, the team has identified that our next step is to develop a “real world” connection to reading. Students need to value reading as a part of everyday life and not just a school activity.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- Graphic novels and comic books
- Non-fiction text resources: Power Magazine, Boldprint, and Reaching Readers texts from Pearson Publishing
- Newspapers

For professional development:

Team Member Quote:
"The impact of this inquiry has fostered a growth in the way I think about teaching; the resources we use, and how we deliver programming. Coming together as a group, rather than developing individual classroom strategies, has helped foster collaboration and discussion within our school.” — Teacher

Administrator Quote:
"Our inquiry project has provided an opportunity for staff to come together to make a difference in our school. I am proud of our team members' ability to select appropriate reading material and embrace the challenge to make a difference in our boys' learning.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
- resources; strategies; professional learning communities; high-interest books; explicit instruction
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Upper Canada District School Board

SCHOOL and GRADE:
Gladstone Public School — Kindergarten

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Susan Murray-Brownlee — Kindergarten Teacher
Nancy Gauthier — Educational Assistant, Kindergarten
Elizabeth Jackson-Barlow — Learning Resource Teacher
Louise Leblanc-Mazur — Learning Resource Coach
Anne-Marie Bulbeck — Principal
Essential Question:
Do boys engage in reading more often and advance their reading skills further when their fathers and male role models read with/to them?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- We have learned that regardless of demographics, diet and nutrition, and the experiences they come to school with, students can make significant improvements in reading skills when they are provided with a rich learning environment:
  - Balanced literacy program
  - High-quality texts (for read-alouds, shared reading, independent reading, and the Book-in-a-Bag program)
  - Focused teaching of comprehension skills (making connections, questioning, making predictions, evaluating, inferring)
  - Providing manipulatives for hands-on learning

Reading vocabulary results improved significantly for many students. Many boys doubled or tripled the number of high-frequency words they could read. Writing vocabulary results also improved for all students. The most significant growth occurred among boys that were a part of the project for two years.

- We have also learned that communicating with parents has a positive impact on the amount they participate in their children’s reading: At the beginning of the project, we found that some parents were not reading to their children at all and only 38% of parents were reading to their children every day. By the end of the project, all parents were reading to their children, 45% of which were reading every day. Parent and student surveys also revealed that some families did not have any books in their home but, by the end of the project, all families had some books and 77% of families had many books.

- We have learned that providing an opportunity for students to play with manipulatives that are directly related to the texts they read has a very positive impact on their enjoyment of the reading experience, and also helps students develop their comprehension (our classroom observations indicated that the level of discussion among students increased during reading response activities; students showed enjoyment in role-playing and required less prompting; students were improving in their ability to retell using their own words; and, students were making better connections).

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

- Our instructional strategies are working and we will continue them. After two years in the Kindergarten program, students’ writing vocabulary has increased from a range of 0 to 8 words in year one, to a range of 0 to 22 words after year two; reading vocabulary has increased from a range of 0 to 8 words to a range of 0 to 30 words.

- We found that student and parent surveys provided important information about the students’ home reading environment (e.g., “Who reads to them?”, “How often do they visit the public library?”, “How many books do they have at home?”).

- Through our Home-Reading Program (read-aloud books, manipulatives, and journals), we sent high-quality reading materials to the students’ homes and encouraged parents to spend quality time reading with their child.

Student Quote:
“Reading let’s me feel good in the heart!”

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education

teacheringquiry@oise.utoronto.ca
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Our goal was to introduce boys to the joys of reading and increase their desire to read. Our Kindergarten children arrive at our school with very little knowledge about books and print. We hoped that a Book-in-a-Bag Program would encourage boys to read more. We also wanted to stress the importance of reading to parents and assist them in becoming role models.

The close communication we developed with families was a highlight of our project. Interviews and surveys allowed us to get to know their needs and hopes. We truly enjoyed talking to the children about reading and books — finding out their concepts of reading and who reads to them at home. We discovered that 35% of the children lived in a single-parent (i.e., mothers). Many parents did not see themselves as readers and a small percentage did not read to their children at all. We discovered that 60% were male and 40% females; that the transience rate was 35%; and, that many were ESL students.

We noted that boys were most interested in non-fiction and that this interest increased during the project. The Book-in-a-Bag Program was a huge success! With each book, in order to increase interest and focus conversation about the story, we included a small manipulative related to the story (e.g., finger puppets, plastic figures, or small toys). We planned special events to celebrate reading and these were well-attended and well-received. It was a pleasure to share the books and reading response journals with students. Reading at home increased and, as the project expanded, there was a definite improvement given to the importance of reading. We were excited by the interaction between male reading buddies from the junior classes and the thrill about reading and books that came through in the interviews with students. The response from our boys was great! They became much more attentive to the reading process; they were curious about what was written in the books and about how the manipulatives were related to the story. The manipulatives also encourage conversation about the book selection. Our successes were notable! Our families are now more involved in reading with their children. More fathers, brothers, and other adult males are reading themselves and to the boys in their families. There is an increase in the number of homes where children are read to on a regular basis. Children are more aware of written text and now express a desire to read. Boys have begun to see themselves as readers!

Although our project was successful, we did experience some challenges. Our first hurdle was to find the hook to engage the boys in reading. Choosing the right materials for the program was crucial and time-consuming. Due to the nature of our community, encouraging fathers (and mothers) to become more involved in reading with their sons was difficult. We also needed to make sure that our girls benefited from the program. Finally, constant monitoring was important to ensure that all students were progressing and participating in all aspects of the project. Given the findings from this project, we hope to stay the course and continue to encourage and promote reading among our boys so they become better readers.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

- To model males as readers, we will continue to promote fathers reading to their sons and daughters, and older boys reading to younger boys.
- We will continue a balanced literacy block, focusing on comprehension and reading strategies.
- We will continue to focus on resources and topics that hook young male readers.
- We have learned that many of our students live in homes that have few books or no books at all. We have also learned that there are many other factors over which we have little control. Although we encouraged families to provide male role-model readers to their boys, male role-models are not available for some students. We found that 35% of our students are being raised by single mothers. We found that, at the beginning of the project, some parents did not read at all to their children. In our Home-Reading Program, 50% of mothers and 25% of fathers were reading the books to their child.
- New questions we have are:
  > How can we provide more male role-models for our students in the school setting?
  > How can we increase families’ use of the public library?
  > How can we improve participation in the home-reading program?

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“The Book-in-a-Bag program allowed me and my son to spend time together reading and talking. It was a special time for us.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Our best assessment methods were: (1) parent and student surveys, (2) reading response journals that accompanied the Book-in-a-Bag Program, (3) reading and writing word recognition assessments, and (4) classroom observations.

We did the parent and student surveys in the fall and again in the spring. The surveys provided us with information about the students’ home reading environment, and helped us to gauge the success of our strategies and initiatives. The surveys also gave us a general idea of how often the parents read themselves, how often they read to their children, who read to their children, the amount of reading material in the home, what kinds of books the children enjoyed, what reading meant to them, and how often the family used the public library. The information allowed us to understand how much support students got at home, and most importantly, how many boys had male role-models for reading.

The fall survey data was central to the implementation of our strategies and initiatives. For example, through the fall surveys, we learned that many of our students live in homes where parents seldom read, reading material was minimal, and few boys had male role-models for reading. Therefore, we decided to have Dad’s Day and invited fathers to come to the Kindergarten classroom for lunch, followed by a presentation about the importance of male role-model readers for boys. We also introduced the Book-in-a-Bag program so fathers could have an opportunity to read to their children. The day ended with a presentation from the public library about resources and upcoming activities. We realized that some fathers would not be able to attend this celebration. Therefore, we opened the invitation to include uncles, grandfathers, older brothers, and mothers so we could effectively deliver the message that it is important for boys to have male role-models for reading.

Through the spring surveys, we found that there was an increase in the frequency with which parents read to their children, the quantity of reading material available, and an increase in the number of older brothers and grandfathers reading to the boys. Although Dad’s Day was not the sole initiative put in place to improve reading at home, the data indicated it was an effective strategy.

We also assessed students’ word recognition skills in the fall and again in the spring each year. We assessed the students on a one-to-one basis — the students identified sight words they could read and were also prompted to write words on their own. This data was essential for us to determine how much each student’s reading skills were improving and was an excellent indicator of how our instructional strategies were working. In fact, we found that the assessment of word recognition skills is more revealing than PM Benchmark levels, since the reading level that is determined by the PM Benchmarks is limited by the vocabulary the student knows in the text that is used for the PM Benchmark assessment.

Finally, our classroom observations were also important because they allowed us to determine how the students’ reading skills were improving. Throughout their time in the Kindergarten program, the students demonstrated an increased ability to talk about what they knew and to make connections to the texts they read. Students were also using cues in the text to make appropriate predictions and were beginning to make inferences. Recently, one of the boys in the class raised his hand during the shared reading lesson and said, “I know what that word is. It’s ‘infer’ and I know what it means. It means ‘I think.’”. As well, students demonstrated an increased interest in a variety of materials. They were more engaged in their reading experiences and showed independence in choosing materials they liked to read. For example, one boy, rather than choosing to play in the kitchen center, build a structure, or put together the train set, chose to take his reading bin and read the books on his own. After reading, he took his reading assessment booklet — in which his teacher tracked his reading anecdotally as well as completed occasional running records — and asked the teacher to write something in his book. These examples illustrate the confidence and pride that our boys are beginning to show in their reading abilities.

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?
Throughout our study, we attempted to encourage fathers and other male role models to read to their boys. We used the following data collection methods to draw our conclusions: Parent Reading Survey (pre and post), Student Interest Survey (pre and post), PM Benchmark levels (Fall and Spring), Concepts About Print (Fall and Spring), Word Recognition (Fall and Spring), and Reading Response Journals (full year).

At the beginning of both 2006-07 and 2007-08, students were below the first PM Benchmark level. They then progressed to varying levels within level 1 or progressed up to level 6 with 90% accuracy. We believe that this was due to the increased exposure to reading at home and at school. Parents responded positively to the request to increase reading at home with their children. Our focused literacy block also increased student exposure to literacy activities at school.

The reading vocabulary assessment showed an increase over the two year period. In the first graph above, our students were completing their first year in the project. In the second graph, students were completing their second year. The number of words recognized by our students was noticeably higher after two years. Our results for Concepts About Print were similar. There was a definite increase for students who were exposed to the project for two years. In the writing assessment, students showed some progress in the first year; however, the students who were involved for two years showed considerable progress.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

As shown in the graphs below, students had a clear preference for fiction at the beginning of the year and a clear preference for non-fiction at the end of the year. We attribute this finding to exposure to a variety of text, but predominantly non-fiction text.

![Graph 1: What kind of books do you like to read? 2006-2007](image1)

![Graph 2: Student Survey: Do you like reading storybooks or information books? 2007-2008](image2)

![Graph 3: Who reads to you at home? 2006 - 2007](image3)

![Graph 4: Who reads to you at home? 2007 - 2008](image4)

During our final interviews with parents, we noticed a change in the attitudes towards reading. There was a definite improvement in the number of parents who read to their children as well as an increase in the frequency of reading per week. In 2006-07, 6% of our families did not read to their children at home. However, in 2007-08, that percentage was reduced to 0%. There was an increase in the number of families who read 3-4 times a week and everyday. We believe that our Book-in-a-Bag program provided parents books at home to read on a regular basis. We believe this made a difference.

We have seen through our intervention in this project that male students have needs that are different from those of female students. In our study, we have shown that students respond to literature and are more apt to pick up a book and read it, when it sparks their interest. Our project showed that, through careful planning and selection of texts, we can promote positive reading behaviors in boys.

Finally, we concluded that, due to the high percentage of single mothers, mothers are still most likely to be the adult who reads to children at home.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

- Our team members and principal collaborated on ideas for projects such as Dad’s Day. At the end of the year, we discussed together how they worked and what still needed to be improved. Together, we also made decisions about our data collection. For example, in order to determine the answers to questions such as, “Who reads to you at home?” we decided to collect data from parent and student surveys at the beginning and end of the school years.

- We have learned that in order to accurately assess student achievement, a variety of data needs to be collected so that conclusions can be validated. As well, the purpose for collecting data needs to be clear to all the educators participating and timelines need to be set in advance.

- We have learned that it is important to gather data that provides information about the whole child. Finding out about the students’ home environments gives educators insight into the level of support that is provided at home, as well as the students’ life experiences. This type of data gives educators time to thoughtfully prepare for possible obstacles in students’ learning.

- This project enabled us to concentrate attention on our somewhat larger male population. We focused needed attention on our boys’ learning styles, which led us to the use of a variety of hands-on manipulatives to increase visual presentation and sensory internalization, and to the use of appropriate resources that better engaged our boys.

- We found that the use of pie charts or bar graphs helped us to understand and explain our student achievement data and to analyze and compare relevant information over specific periods of time.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- Levelled text, fiction and non-fiction — Sails from Nelson
- Levelled text — Photo Gems from Nelson (fiction texts contain male characters, photographs, and realistic stories with which boys can make connections)
- A wide variety of high quality read-aloud texts that appeal to the interests of boys, accompanied by appropriate manipulatives
- For professional development:
  - Reading With Meaning by Debbie Miller
  - On Solid Ground by Sharon Taberski
  - Strategies That Work (second edition) by Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis

Team Member Quote:
“Through participating in this project, I have had to rethink the way I teach. When planning, I am now more aware of all students’ needs and have been trying to develop activities that excite all students. It has been an extremely valuable experience and, given the enjoyment the boys have show in the classroom, it has been well worth it!”

Administrator Quote:
“This boys’ literacy project has had a powerful effect on the teamwork among the staff involved. The team has overcome a number of obstacles including some change-over in group members and yet the level of collegiality and cooperation has been significant. The learning from this project will no doubt have a positive impact on the action research projects we take on in the future.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
Kindergarten; Book-in-a-Bag; manipulatives; word recognition; surveys
Final School Report: 2008
Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Grand Erie District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Graham Bell - Victoria School, K-6

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Jim Penner (year 1 only)
Jennifer Gray
Lisa Metcalf
Rebecca Franklin (year 3 only)
Vera Hayward — Principal

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
**Essential Question:** To what extent will the infusion of male-oriented literature into the classrooms and library of our school (in a socio-economically depressed area), accompanied by a variety of programs focused on expanding access to reading materials, improve boys' interest in reading and subsequently their basic literacy skills such as reading comprehension as measured by DRA and CASI?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

We learned a lot about the types of print boys like to read. Popular genres among the junior boys included graphic novels, such as the *Bone* series by Jeff Smith, and collections of ghost stories. Non-fiction was also popular, including the *DK Eyewitness* series, the *Ripley's Believe It or Not* and the *Guinness World Records* series. The primary boys enjoyed the *Captain Underpants* series and picture books on popular topics (e.g., trucks, superheroes, and ghost stories). Popular authors included Robert Munsch and Eric Carle. We used these books to teach and model specific strategies and kept boys engaged.

We also discovered that boys learn in different ways. We learned to incorporate more activity-based, hands-on teaching techniques. We knew that boys in general were drawn to video games and computers, so we used this information to our advantage. We incorporated technology more often and used educational websites to get boys excited about learning. By using educational games for all ages on the Internet, boys seemed to think that they were only playing games on the computer and having fun — they did not realize the educational aspect of the activity.

We were surprised that visuals and physical space were important to our boys. By highlighting our newer “cooler” looking books and providing new and comfortable areas for boys to spread out and read, their interest and the amount they read increased.

We were finally able see and recognize the difference between primary and junior boys through the implementation of our boys book clubs. We had a junior and a primary club. While the primary club had regular members all the time, the only real interest from the junior boys was demonstrated when we incorporated technology to play computer games.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

This project has prompted us to track information more quantitatively. Many of us had never used strategies such as reading logs to track what and how often our students were reading. We now use such information to decide where to go next and how to reach the students who are not reading frequently. We were able to encourage boys to explore different genres by focusing on specific genre units in class as well as highlighting individual genres monthly in our school library and through the organization of our classroom libraries. Most of our classroom libraries, as well as our school library, are now organized into bins by genre and author.

We are teaching to students' interests and placing more value on what our boys find exciting. We are also teaching to a variety of learning styles within lessons and providing visuals and hands-on learning opportunities to engage the students who learn in these ways. We have been able to use the Internet as a professional resource and create innovative “boy oriented” lessons for genres that boys may not necessarily have enjoyed before. For example, one teacher created a lesson for a poetry unit by using authors such as Shel Silverstein and Helaine Becker who write silly and fun poetry that boys seem to love. As a result, we saw an impressive improvement in boys' CASI interest inventories in the category of poetry.

**Student Quote:**
“I love reading for information so that I can come to school the next day and tell you about it!” — Grade 5 student
**WHAT IS OUR STORY?**

At the beginning of this project, we had one team member who was leading the project. Jim was enthusiastic and passionate about getting boys to read. While seeing the benefits for the school, we (the other group members) were hesitant to take on such a large endeavor. Jim managed to convince us and we began the inquiry project excited and with high hopes for what we could learn and the results we could achieve. We attended workshops, gathered some starting information, and began formulating our plan.

In year two, Jim left our school and it was a significant blow to us. We felt lost and uncertain of how to proceed without him. However, we regrouped and began working with the school librarian on the largest part of the work that needed to be done – updating our school library, which had not been properly purged or stocked for several years. We did extensive research on deciding what kinds of books to buy. We consulted experts, brought in publishers, and had the boys tell us what they would and would not read. We took days to weed the old and damaged books from the library and we went on a book-buying trip. This trip was a definite highlight for everyone! Once the books arrived, we realized the enormity of the task that faced us; that is, getting the books into the hands of the students. We needed more manpower to get the books carded, labeled, and placed on the shelves. Our task took far longer than we had expected. As the books began to show up on the shelves, the student response was overwhelmingly positive.

All of the new books were available to students by the fall of our third year and it was then that we saw the largest increase in the number of books being signed out. Boys were excited about these books! We put our library programs into place – we added a “Boys Only” section, made peer reviews and recommendations available and organized boys’ book clubs and Family Literacy evenings. Year three had its challenges as well. We had more team member shifts — one team member left for a maternity leave and a new member joined and tried to catch up. We faced many challenges and some of our efforts were not as successful as we had hoped. It was difficult to get the support we needed from all staff members and our Family Literacy nights and boys’ book clubs did not have as much participation as we had hoped. However, we ended the project feeling proud of what we were able to accomplish and looking forward to continuing our efforts next year and implementing everything we have learned.

**WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?**

- We plan to continue our book clubs and literacy nights and change the formats to make them more successful. For example, we realized that Family Literacy Nights require some incentives to get parents in our demographic area to attend. In addition, we will incorporate more technology to make the boys’ book clubs more popular.
- We will continue to keep our boys’ interests and learning styles in mind, and educate all staff members on how they can do the same.
- We will continue to collect data and make sure the upward trend in our results continues.
- We plan to promote our library programs more actively. We would like to have students involved in the promotions (e.g., doing announcements and making posters).

The project has brought new questions to mind. Now that we know what our boys enjoy reading and what teaching strategies work, how can we use these strategies more often and throughout the whole school to ensure that all students are benefiting? For example, how can we get more technology into our classrooms?

**Parent/Guardian Quote:**

“The literacy nights gave us new ideas. Instead of telling him he must read, now we have some ways to make reading more enjoyable. It was nice to hear some different approaches.” — Parent of a Grade 4 student
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

To determine if our boys’ reading competencies had increased, we used DRA for the primary boys and CASI for the junior boys.

We collected the DRA results at the beginning and end of each year for boys across the primary grades. We began in the spring of 2006 and at the end of the 2005-06 year. Results for the fall of 2005-06 were not used because some results were missing. We recorded each boy’s DRA reading level and calculated the average for each time period. We then graphed the averages to determine whether the average reading level for primary boys in our school was increasing over the duration of the project.

We also collected CASI results at the beginning and end of each year. We began with results recorded in the fall of 2005 and ended with those recorded in the spring of 2008. We decided to focus on specific CASI questions rather than looking at all results, to keep the data from overwhelming us. We decided to analyse the results for the skills that we deemed to be most important for our school community; that is, the ones that we considered to be the most basic literacy skills. We looked at:

- summarizing skills;
- main idea comprehension; and
- conventions.

CASI is marked by “levels”, so we recorded the level achieved by each boy who wrote the test and averaged them. In our school community, especially at the beginning of a school year, many students are unable to provide a response that meets even the level 1 criteria and so we assigned those students an R result, which for statistical purposes we entered as a “0”.

We tracked library sign-outs monthly over the 2006-07 school year and the 2007-08 school year to determine whether there was an increase in the number of sign-outs. We decided not to include the data for every month in our report and instead just focused on three months spaced throughout the school years – October, January, and May.

We also looked at the CASI reading attitude surveys at the beginning and end of the 2007-08 school year for our junior boys. We focused only on question 3 (“I enjoy reading at home.”) and question 10 (“Reading is boring.”) to gauge how much our boys liked to read. We used question 13 (“I choose books to read that other people have recommended.”) to determine whether our strategy of having students write book recommendations for each other was a useful one.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

The following graph shows the junior boys' progress over three school years on the selected CASI questions. In our school community, students do very little reading outside of school over the summer and so there is a distinct dip in results each fall. However, when the fall of each year is compared, there is a steady increase for every question studied. The spring results are much better and again, there is an increase in CASI scores every spring.

The average score for “Summarizing” in spring of 2008 was 1.929, up from a value of 0.500 in the fall of 2005, a year when a very large number of boys were unable to provide even a level 1 response.

The average score for “Main Idea Comprehension” in the spring of 2008 was 1.652, up from 0.389 in the fall of 2005.

The average score for “Conventions” in the spring of 2008 was 1.857, up from 0.500 in the fall of 2005.

Although the average score achieved at the end of the inquiry project is just below a level 2 and is not approaching the provincial standard, level 3, we are proud of the progress that we have made in such a short time.

The graph on the top of the next page shows the primary boys' progress in their reading levels as determined by DRA testing. Again, we see a slight dip each fall after the students have been off school for the summer, doing less reading. However, the decline is less in this case as there were only a few students whose reading levels actually declined over the summer.

In the spring of 2006, the average reading level across all the primary boys was 13.375. In the spring of 2008, the average reading level across all primary boys had increased to 15.408. We do not know how this compares to the provincial standard or other schools, but we do see that there has been a steady improvement.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

When library book sign-outs were compared for the 2006-07 school year with the 2007-08 school year, we saw a significant increase. The increase was noted for every month of the school year but, to save space, we have included only three months, spaced throughout the school year.

The results from our Reading Attitude Surveys were encouraging as well, and suggest to us that the overall attitude towards reading among boys in our school improved. The results also suggested to us that peer recommendations play an important role in the way boys select books.

- For question 3 (“I enjoy reading at home.”), the number of students who responded, “I do not agree.” declined 14%. The number of students who responded, “I strongly agree.” increased 50%.
- For question 10 (“Reading is boring.”), the number of students who responded, “I do not agree.” increased 33%. The number of students who responded, “I strongly agree.” declined 25%.
- For question 13 (“I choose books to read that other people have recommended.”), the number of students who responded, “I do not agree.” declined to 0% by the end of the year. Boys who disagreed with this statement in the fall, responded with, “I agree a little.” or “I agree.” by the end of the year. Boys who responded, “I strongly agree.” increased by 30% over the year.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

We are learning a multitude of different ways to involve our students and community more actively in literacy development. We have learned to value our students’ choices and work with them rather than against them. It is crucial to consider their interests in our planning, if they are to be engaged in the learning and if we are to make learning significant for them. In this respect, we believe that read alouds are an important tool in involving and engaging students. They allow teachers to introduce genres, conventions, and characteristics of print to their classes, as well as model fluency, questioning, and reflection. They also provide the visual aspect that is important to our boys. Another successful method we used to engage boys in reading was a book pass. This tool allows students to rate and recommend books to others. In this activity, each student chooses a book and writes a recommendation, then, on the teacher’s direction, they are requested to pass the book a certain direction. This introduces them to new books that other students have chosen and allows them to look over those books and possibly see something interesting they may not have recognized before.

Some of the highlights of our inquiry included visits of male authors. This was a great way to build enthusiasm for the books written by the visiting authors, as well as for literature in general. The boys’ excitement during these visits was phenomenal. We attended some fantastic conferences on action research and boys’ literacy, both of which only made us more excited about the project. The book buying was also a major highlight. We had publishers come to the school with “boy friendly” literature and we went on a HUGE book buying trip to Toronto, which was a very exciting day! Most of the excitement, though, came from simply seeing an improvement and the fun our boys were having with reading. This is rare for students in our demographic area.

Finally, the best part of everything that we accomplished during this project was the opportunity to see our boys read and to hear them ask us to read.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- Graphic novels (e.g., the Bone series by Jeff Smith)
- Non-fiction (e.g., DK Eyewitness, “grossology”)

For professional development:
- Guided Readers and Writers by Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinne
- Strategies that Work by Stephanie Harvey
- The Minds of Boys: Saving Our Sons From Falling Behind in School and in Life by Michael Gurian and Kathy Stevens

Team Member Quote:
“One of the most amazing things happened today. I introduced all of the new classroom books to my students. I explained that these were for the boys’ project that I had been working on and, immediately after I finished introducing the books, my WHOLE class wanted to read and were actually excited about it! It was such an incredible and proud moment.”

Administrator Quote:
“Since the purchase of our new literacy resources, the library and classrooms have taken on an exciting and vibrant new look. I am now frequently seeing BOYS reading around the school and even out on the playground!”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
core school; low socioeconomic; reading comprehension; reading attitudes; library sign-outs
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Halton District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Hawthorne Village Public School — JK-Grade 8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Grant Clatworthy — Principal
Lidia Marchand — Vice-Principal
Robert Ianuzzi — Vice-Principal
Jane Opie — Grade 4 teacher
Pat VanBenthem — Grade 4 teacher
Christine Vanderwal — Grade 5 teacher
Krista Morrison — Grade 1 teacher
James Montgomery — Special Education Resource teacher
Lois McNally — Teacher-Librarian
Jen Giardino — Kindergarten teacher

Previous Team Members:
Jane Lewis — Vice-Principal
Karen Blackwell — Vice-Principal

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
**Essential Question:** What effect does the integration of Drama/Dance/Music/Visual Arts in shared reading instruction have on students’ (1) reading fluency, (2) comprehension of text, and (3) motivation towards reading?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- The integration of the arts has a profound positive impact on literacy learning for both boys and girls.
- Shared reading most definitely made a difference in the levels of confidence and fluency for our male readers.
- Integrating the arts also had a profound effect on the PM Benchmark scores for many of our “at risk” readers, both boys and girls.
- We experienced an increase in the willingness of boys to share their learning through drama, dance, music, and art at monthly “Arts Beats” assemblies.
- We noticed that boys (and girls) are more highly motivated as learners when they can participate in authentic arts activities in all areas of the curriculum.
- Students with less well developed literacy skills are beginning to “star” at monthly “Arts Beats” assemblies — they are proud to be able to share their learning.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

- Our finding that the integration of the arts increases motivation for reading helped change the way we look at our teaching practices.
- We increased our use of the “arts” in our reading programs (all programs).
- We targeted “at risk” students (a target group in each class).
- Our whole school was involved with shared reading (consistent by grade team) with whole school in-services.
- Qualitative data was more valued and accepted throughout our school.
- We increased grade team planning and the use of consistent lessons in grades.
- We used consistent assessment practices for: (1) grades 1-8 reading comprehension, (2) grades 3-8 fluency, and (3) grades 1-8 motivation.
- We increased the integration of professional artists in our classrooms (i.e., Canadian Opera Company, Learning Through the Arts Project, Shakespeare in Schools Project, and Arts/Literacy Conference).

**Student Quote:**

“When I can see actions in the words I am reading I understand much better.”

“Reading when the teacher reads allows me to join in whenever I want. I am feeling more confident in my reading.”

“I liked wearing the costumes that the Canadian Opera Company brought. I learned about singing a story rather than just saying it. Wearing costumes makes you ‘feel’ more like the characters.”

“I like talking like they talked in Shakespeare’s time. The language had a rhythm to it”

— Grade 4 Students

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
**WHAT IS OUR STORY?**

- We began with a small number of staff who had a vision of addressing the needs of all students (especially boys) in reading through increasing their motivation, comprehension, and fluency.

- Once our project was approved, a few more staff members were asked to join the team (i.e., those with experience in the arts, literacy, etc.).

- We met with our Literacy coordinators and laid out a plan to inform staff.

- We conducted a whole school in-service on shared reading.

- We identified a cohort of students in each class (i.e., struggling readers).

- We administered pre-assessments to each cohort group.

- We did grade team planning (plan 3 shared reading lessons integrating the arts).

- We held our first *Teaching and Learning Through the Arts* conference.

- We administered a post-assessment to each cohort group and reflected on our practices for the year.

- We continued to celebrate learning through “Arts Beats”, “Art Night”, etc.

- We did grade team planning (literacy lesson, linking the arts).

- We held our second *Teaching and Learning Through the Arts* conference.

**WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?**

We will continue to:

- emphasize integration of the arts in our teaching, especially in the area of Language Arts;

- celebrate learning through monthly “Arts Beats” assemblies, Arts Nights, etc.;

- look for ways to raise funds so we are able to hold our third *Teaching and Learning Through the Arts* conference;

- foster our relationships with the professional artists and encourage their involvement in planning and co-teaching various units throughout the grades; and

- track our cohort group to determine whether they are improving.

**Parent/Guardian Quote:**

“My child couldn’t stop talking about the literacy conference and all of the activities. He especially enjoyed learning about William Shakespeare and the language he used when writing his plays.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

The following are examples of the types of data we collected during our project. Although we have started using DRA as one of our reading assessments in the junior and intermediate grades, this data was not compiled as part of our project.

- PM Benchmarks
- Report card achievement in reading
- Fluency assessment (grades 3-8)
- Motivation survey (grades 1-8)
- Comprehension assessment (grades 1-8)
- DRA results
- Cohort groups' marks
- Atmosphere of school/feedback from Arts/Literacy presenters
- Anecdotal comments

Survey Results
Our initial plan was to survey parents and students about the integration of arts and reading. However, the complexity of survey development and ensuring data reliability caused us to rethink this aspect of our program.

Our survey during the first year focused on gathering information on what boys liked to read and also whether or not they were more motivated to read if they were allowed to demonstrate their understanding through the arts.

Key results from our survey for the first year include:

- Boys and girls find the shared reading strategy makes them feel more comfortable and confident as readers.
- Boys are more motivated to read if they have the opportunity to “act out” their understandings.
- Boys prefer to read non-fiction books, especially graphic novels.
- Boys and girls state that they better understand text when shared reading is followed by arts integration.
- In most cases, there was no significant difference between boys and girls in their preference for arts integration in their reading program.

Assessment Data
Cohort groups of students achieving at Level 2 or below in reading were identified in each class in the school. Although our work was ambitious, we realized that the assessment information gathered on Kindergarten children was very unreliable and as a result eliminated this cohort group after year one.

We have continued however to track students from year to year, assessing comprehension only in grades 1 and 2 and assessing comprehension and fluency in grades 4 and higher.

The following are interesting trends we found in our data:

- Comprehension and fluency do not necessarily improve at the same rate.
- Many of the cohorts of students continue to be low achievers in reading.
- Low achievement for students in some cohorts was the result of learning disabilities.
- Students are improving, which may be attributed to the integration of the arts.
- Shared reading as a strategy is effective.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

- Increased teacher collaboration in lesson planning.
- Increased consistency throughout the grade(s) with common language.
- Increased knowledge and skills related to ways to integrate the arts in various lessons.
- Aids in ways to address the needs of our boys (especially those who are struggling) in our classes.
- Increased awareness of “shared reading” and how it looks in the various grades.
- Increased participation and integration of professional artists in various grades and units (i.e., Canadian Opera Company, Stratford, Learning Through the Arts, Arts/Literacy Conference).
- Increased opportunities for students to showcase and share their learning with others (e.g., Arts Beats, Arts Nights).
- Improved teaching practices through in-services on shared reading and the Arts/Literacy Conference.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:

For professional development:
Teaching Integrated Arts in the Primary School by Anne Bloomfield; Arts as Meaning Makers by C. Cornett and K. Smithrim; The NEW Drama Themes by Larry Swartz; Story Drama by David Booth; Even Hockey Players Read by David Booth; Poetry Goes to School by Bob Barton and David Booth; I Read It, But I Don’t Get It by Chris Tovani; Literacy Work Stations by Debbie Diller

Team Member Quote:
“There is no doubt that my students are more engaged when I incorporate one or more of the arts into their programs. They seem more excited about learning and now ask if we will be able to ‘act it out’ or ‘draw their interpretations of text’. The project has also provided a unique way of pulling our staff together to focus on improving how we teach.”

Administrator Quote:
“As a new school, our project provided an opportunity to focus on improved student learning throughout the school. Every teacher effectively utilized shared reading as a teaching strategy in their literacy program. There was a sincere sense of accomplishment by all staff in the school. It was a terrific feeling in June when we celebrated our accomplishments as a professional learning community.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
boys; shared reading; arts; fluency; comprehension

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Lambton Kent District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
High Park Public School — JK-8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
2005-2006 — Pam Graham (Principal), Fredreika Hunter (Teacher)
2006-2007 — Karen Dunning (Principal), Leslie Fraleigh (Teacher), Fredreika Hunter (Teacher),
2007-2008 — Karen Dunning (Principal), Tony Mitchell (Vice Principal), Fredrieka Hunter (Teacher),
Kelly Lemieux (Teacher), Cindy Mackay (Teacher), Tracy Pereira (Teacher),
Consultation with Claire McDowell (Principal of Program)
Essential Question:
Will interactive writing strategies and direct instruction focused on authentic learning experiences improve the literacy skills of boys currently achieving at Level 2?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Good teaching practices for boys means good teaching practices for all students.
- When boys are motivated, their enjoyment of reading increases and they become more engaged with their writing. When they are inspired, they write.
- Boys like to write about topics they like and what they know about, even if it’s gross! They are more eager to write about topics that are relevant to them or topics with which they have made a connection. Our students loved to write about real life, hands-on experiences.
- Our boys generally preferred writing what they thought could be completed in a short length of time (e.g., raps, poetry, and procedures). We feel boys need to be confident that they can accomplish the writing activity before they start.
- Motivating boys is not enough; teaching and assessment practices need to change to see long term improvement. Assessment needs to be a balance of diagnostic, formative, and summative to analyze all stages of the students' learning.
- Common rubrics, assessments, and practices allow teachers within a division to collaboratively assess student work and to discuss next steps for improvement. Collaboration deepens each teacher’s understanding of the assessment cycle. When teachers collaboratively plan and assess, consistency across the grades increases. Consistency within a school is an effective practice for improving literacy.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?
Teachers within divisions have begun to collaborate more, especially during our “Write Weeks”. Teachers have provided opportunities for students to read, write, and share experiences based on a wide variety of genre. Our school-wide writing framework means that all classrooms are studying a particular writing form (e.g., persuasive writing) at the same time. This has allowed teachers to gain a deeper understanding of non-fiction forms of writing and what they look like across the grades.

We regularly use student-developed anchor charts in all our classrooms and students use the anchor charts during their writing activities. Word walls throughout the school also support writing activities.

Teachers plan diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments during “Write Weeks” and are beginning to apply these same assessment practices to other areas of the curriculum throughout the year.

Teachers are offering more writing experiences that are relevant to the lives of the students in their classrooms. More interactive writing strategies, both modeled and shared, are conducted with the students before they are asked to write independently. We find that boys write more if they first have opportunities for oral communication about the topic.

Student Quote:
“While completing a procedural task on How to Make a Sundae, one Grade 3 student said, ‘This is not writing. This is too much fun to be writing‘.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Our boys’ literacy project began in the spring of 2006 with principal, Pam Graham. Two learning teams, primary and junior, were already established in the school. Divisions were working on a common focus of literacy but had three distinct questions for primary, junior, and intermediate and a broad range of strategies. After a gap analysis showed a need for non-fiction print materials to motivate boys, we ordered books for each of the divisions.

A new principal, Karen Dunning, was in place in September 2006 as the books were unpacked and shelved in the book rooms. At our division meetings, we determined how to best integrate the new resources into the language program. Our staff meetings initially focused on finding interactive strategies to motivate boys (e.g., Chalk n’ Sock for making words in the primary classes). We used some of the grant money to purchase Royal Writing Centers for each primary classroom to facilitate interactive writing and to bring two authors to the school — Michael Wade and Eric Walters. The authors created a great deal of excitement throughout the school. It was very visible in the classrooms that all students, but especially the boys, were highly motivated to read the books written by these two authors. Intermediate students became excited about a new media unit that was developed by our teachers. Unfortunately, staff members lamented that, although more boys were motivated to read, the boys achieving at Level 2 were not significantly improving especially in their written responses and writing assignments. It became apparent that we had to narrow the focus of our essential question and find new instructional strategies. Therefore, in the spring of 2007, we developed a school-wide “Write Week” based on persuasive writing. After motivating the students with a rap artist, all students in grades 1-8 had a pre-assessment and survey, direct instruction on persuasive writing (including modeled and shared writing), and a post-assessment and survey. Teachers in all divisions worked together to develop common rubrics and assessments and to later analyze the data. As we debriefed our “Write Week”, we agreed that we needed to further develop our common assessments to ensure consistency. (For example, one junior class created raps and another class wrote persuasive letters. It was then a challenge to analyze the data.) We knew we would have to work more collaboratively in the next year.

We added new members to our team which then became our Writing Committee. We said goodbye to L. Fraleigh and welcomed T. Pereira, C. Mackay, and K. Lemieux who represented each division. We began by developing a “Writing Frame” for the school year, which outlined monthly writing forms aligned with the six write traits. Two “Write Weeks” were planned for December and May (procedural and descriptive writing). Although the number of boys in our target group who moved from Level 2 to Level 3 remained fewer than we had hoped for, most of the boys did demonstrate improvement in their writing over the past two years. As can be seen in our data, many of the boys in our target group moved closer to a Level 3. We remain optimistic that we will continue to see improvements, especially in our EQAO results in writing this year.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

As part of our project, High Park P.S. developed a “Writing Frame” for the year 2007-08. For next year, the Lambton Kent District School Board has established a common “Writing Frame” to ensure consistency in all schools.

We need to use creative scheduling and find more time throughout the day and at division meetings to create common assessments and to collaborate. Teachers want to continue to plan and assess student work with their colleagues through the Teacher Moderation process.

Teachers continue to be concerned with the large number of boys who are reluctant to complete their written assignments and we need to continue to find strategies to improve boys’ attitudes. We need to increase our boys’ motivation to persevere and to succeed with longer writing assignments and provincial assessments.

Next year, we want to further explore writing opportunities for our boys using technology (e.g., more SMART Boards, writing blogs for written responses, and more extensive use of assistive technology).

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“For a literacy program, it is important to engage boys using different media. For example, using blogs on the computer for writing journal entries for the books they are reading and finding the appropriate books to capture and maintain their interest have been extremely beneficial. When boys are interested and engaged in what they are reading, it is the opportunity to develop a lifetime love of reading.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

High Park P. S. teachers have learned to use a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. Most of our data this year has been gathered during our two “Write Weeks” in December and May. During our “Write Weeks”, teachers conducted pre- and post-writing attitude surveys as well as baseline and summative assessments for each writing form (procedural and descriptive writing). This data was analyzed at the division level according to pre-established rubrics. Report card marks for writing were also compared from November 2006 to March 2007 to determine if there was an overall improvement in our target group of approximately fifty boys. This year’s EQAO data will be compared to previous years when received.

We used established surveys to explore boys' attitudes towards writing. In the primary grades, we asked forced-choice (yes and no) questions such as, “Do you like to write stories?”. We also asked junior students to complete open-ended sentences such as, “I feel this way because...”. Our teachers felt the pre- and post-surveys had more validity at the junior level. This year, in the primary grades, there did not appear to be a strong correlation between students’ achievement and how much boys liked to write and the pre- and post-surveys had mixed results. Some boys actually reported a decrease in how much they liked to write after the “Write Week” although their writing improved. In the junior grades, however, students graphed their results and found that there was an increase in how much the students liked to write during our “Write Weeks” when students were highly motivated. Recently some of our junior teachers have begun to explore the use of online surveys that they can design themselves (e.g., a teacher designed a survey of students’ reactions to this year’s EQAO assessments). Survey questions can then be more closely correlated to the test results.

We have begun to use more quantitative data this year to support our inquiry. Summative assessments of a variety of forms of writing have been compared to baseline assessments during our “Write Weeks” after intensive motivation, direct instruction, modeling, and practice. (For example, during this year’s first “Write Week” based on procedural writing, all junior students wrote the steps used in recipes such as How to Make a Sundae.) Common rubrics within divisions provided clear expectations for students. Because teachers within divisions are using similar rubrics and assessments, they have been able to share samples of student work to achieve consistency and rich discussions have taken place about assessment, best practices, and next steps. Although we have a lot to learn about Teacher Moderation, we feel we have begun to use this process.

Qualitative data (teacher observations and anecdotes) continue to show that boys’ writing improves during activities that are highly motivating, when there is direct instruction about the writing form and with the use of visuals such as anchor charts, word walls, and graphic organizers (e.g., during our “Write Weeks”). Our data also shows that many of the boys in our target group continue to be more reluctant and to take fewer risks during day-to-day written tasks. These boys’ oral answers are often more complete than their written responses. They respond well and their writing improves when they are told “Let’s make it better.”, and when they are told to add more rather than having to erase and rewrite their work.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Junior Students
Analysis of “Write Week” Data

Our Grade 5/6 students analyzed the data and found a significant increase in the summative assessments and the post-attitude surveys at the end of this year’s first “Write Week” based on procedural writing.

Primary Division
Analysis of “Write Week” Data for Boys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Unchanged</th>
<th>Improved skill</th>
<th>Declined in skill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>84.6%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our primary teachers analyzed the data after our second “Write Week” this year based on descriptive writing. They found that although only a few students moved up to a Level 3, many of the students improved their writing skills within the level.

teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca
This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
Twelve of the boys in our target group of forty seven boys moved from Levels 1 or 2 to the provincial standard in writing since last year.

Twenty seven of the boys in our target group have shown improvement in their writing since last year. Although many of them continue to achieve at a level 2, they are closely approaching the provincial standard of level 3.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

The boys' literacy inquiry at High Park has become the central focus of our School Improvement Plan.

When we look for print resources for our school, we now try to ensure that the books purchased support the interests and experiences of our boys as well as our girls. We have a wide variety of non-fiction books.

When we ask our boys to write, we try to make it relevant or to find connections with their experiences or interests. We want our boys to be motivated and engaged in their writing.

Anchor charts and modeled and shared writing activities prepare our boys for new writing forms and genres.

We are realizing that our students need to see a connection between the reading material and the subsequent writing activities.

Although we initially started by procuring common resources for the school, High Park staff members now share practices, common rubrics, and common assessments at least within the divisions. A school-wide Writing Frame has promoted consistency across the grades. Discussions at division meetings provide ideas, strategies, and troubleshooting tips. It has allowed teachers to focus on divisional strengths and next steps for writing.

Over the course of the boys' literacy inquiry, teachers at High Park have realized the importance of gathering data and we are learning how to collaboratively analyze and interpret it in order to improve our students' achievement. Looking at data as divisions rather than individually has ensured more validity in our findings (larger samples are being compared), more consistency, and has led to professional discussions.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Author Michael Wade’s series of books, Books for Boys
Critical Literacy Series by Jamestown
Nelson Boldprint books
Royal Writing Centers (rolling cart with white board, manipulatives, and containers)
Nelson Write Traits

For professional development:
Better Answers by Ardith Davis Cole
Reading With Meaning by Debbie Miller
The Write Genre by Lori Jamieson Rog and Paul Kropp

Team Member Quote:
“When given a choice on what to write about and the proper tools to bring their writing alive, students, especially boys, enjoy writing more and show a more positive attitude and ownership over their writing.”

Administrator Quote:
“High Park boys have become more excited about writing even though they don’t always recognize their activities as traditional writing. When they are given a reason to write and it’s a topic they are interested in, we see improvements.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
writing frame, Write Weeks, interactive, engaged, collaborative
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Toronto District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Hillcrest Community Public School — Junior Kindergarten to Grade 6

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Sophia Kouvaris – 2006 to 2007
David Brinsmead – 2006 to 2007
Angela Ling – 2006 to 2008
Jonathan Ophek – 2007 to 2008
Essential Question:
Would a greater variety of current reading materials, teacher resources, teacher development, and participation in the arts help the boys at Hillcrest Community School develop a more positive attitude towards reading and develop better reading skills? Would there be an effect on academic achievement?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

Findings:
- Focus on attitudes towards reading to help determine reading success.
- Recognize and understand that boys need intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to read.
- Allow boys to select books and reading materials that interest and appeal to them.

Recommendations:
- Get staff, community, and all students in the school involved in at least one literacy initiative, but provide programs to specifically target boys in order to help motivate them to read (e.g.; school-wide Literacy Day with guest speakers/presenters and weekly Boys Book Club).
- Survey the boys in the school to determine what types of books they like to read, and buy sets (e.g.; six books) for teachers to sign out in the library and use in their classrooms. Allocate a boys literacy section in the library

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?
- Invited and read with a small group of boys on a weekly basis – Boys Book Club of 12-16 students (2006-07 Gr. 3 and Gr. 6 students; 2007-08 Gr. 2 and Gr. 3 students).
- We held boys-centred literature circles – boys read together and focused discussion on books that appealed to them (e.g.; main character is a male role model).
- Brought the issue of gender-based learning to the attention of our staff. Our literacy coordinator gave a professional development workshop and provided strategies on “Boys and Reading” and “Reading to Succeed”.
- Changed the way we look at boys and literacy — now we consciously think of strategies for boys when doing our literacy planning (e.g.; modify whole group instructional time, small group discussion).
- Changed the way we assess boys' reading — we now recognize the importance of qualitative data such as interviews and observations.

Student Quote:
"The best part about the Boys Book Club is reading books I like. It's fun! It's great!"
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Our plan was to bring awareness of boys' literacy to our school and learn strategies to help our boys become better readers and enjoy reading. The highlights of our Boys' Literacy Initiative have been planning a school-wide Literacy Day, where classes rotated through guest presenters such as an author, and illustrator, a musician, and a motivational speaker. The Boys' Literacy Night was specifically for the male students and their parents. Our literacy coordinator spoke to the parents and offered strategies for reading with their children and sons. In the first year of the Boys Book Club, the 16 members attended a full day conference for boys. Here we met many other Boys Book Clubs and were able to visit a variety of literacy presentations and activities. Finally, for the past two years, the Boys Book Club has been a popular extracurricular activity and is held once a week for a group of 12-16 invited students. The boys in the club were responsible for outlining, judging, and promoting a school-wide bookmark contest.

We feel that the boys and staff most enjoyed the Boys' Literacy Night and school-wide Literacy Day. Boys were introduced to male literacy role models and given testimonials by guest speakers, authors, and illustrators. Reading with a small group of boys in the weekly Boys Book Club has also been rewarding and has helped build their confidence. At first the boys in the club were very shy and insecure about their reading. As the weeks went by, all the boys wanted a turn to read aloud!

One of the challenges was planning a whole school event such as the Literacy Day and Boys' Literacy Night. Along with the staff's support, the boys made posters and promoted the event. We invited a Toronto District School Board literacy specialist to show our parents strategies to help their boys become better readers.

We learned that boys can be motivated to read through intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Boys need positive reinforcement. It is important to include the male staff in initiatives focused on boys. Many of the boys who participated throughout the initiatives demonstrated lots of positive feedback; maintained perfect attendance at the Boys Book Club, and were excited to learn to read and feel success.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

We have created a Boys Book Section in the library for teachers to sign out sets of graphic novels (primary and junior). The collection of books was based on results from a survey we administered on Attitudes Towards Reading Materials. The Boys Book Club has been a success! By inviting a small group of boys (12-16 boys), we have been able to read leveled books and create discussion around the literature. Boys want to continue with the club and are already making suggestions on books to read next year. We can perhaps encourage boy-specific literature circles in classrooms and provide teachers with gender- and age-appropriate resources. We can also work towards getting a better grip on how to effectively use qualitative data.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

"The Boys Book Club has helped support my son's reading comprehension and has given him a lot more confidence with reading. He developed great reading strategies in a comfortable and fun environment. My son really enjoyed being a part of the Hillcrest Boys Book Club!"
**WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?**

**DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:**

When we started our inquiry 3 years ago, our team was keen on qualitative data. We wanted to see changes in our EQAO scores as well as DRA results. We began by assembling a DRA wall and administering a school-wide reading attitude survey. We quickly learned that our plans were difficult and tedious. With the help of the OISE/UT Teacher Inquiry Team at a workshop, we learned that it could be more informative to focus on a purposeful sample of qualitative data.

We took some information from our survey and used it to help determine what new books to buy for our school library. Our boys told us that they loved to read magazines, comic books, and joke books. Therefore, our librarian added a variety of magazine subscriptions, more nonfiction books (mostly for primary students), and more graphic novels. Once we highlighted these new books in our library, there was increased circulation. As one teacher noted: "My boys no longer looked around the library without a purpose during library time, they now went right for these books and I noticed them discussing them among one another."

One significant discovery was that the majority of junior boys in our school did not like poems. Our team learned that one of the reasons for this was that poetry was not modelled as much in our junior grades and that there were not enough poetry books in our library with poems to interest our junior boys. Therefore, we bought some new poetry anthologies, including the poems of Jon Scieszka.

We decided that the purposeful sample that we were going to use for our qualitative data was our Boys Book Club. We gave them a survey, observed them, and finally interviewed the boys and their teachers. We found that many boys were intimidated by students who were "good readers" in their classes and they sometimes felt uncomfortable reading aloud. For the small group of boys in the book club, we focused on creating a comfortable reading environment and helped make reading fun by playing phonics games.

**Reading Attitude Survey**
We used questionnaires to find out about boys’ reading attitudes, habits, and preferences. This survey included 17 statements on attitudes towards reading. For example, "Reading is an important activity", "I enjoy reading at home", and "I'd rather listen to a story than read it myself". This was a ready-made questionnaire. Students were asked to answer each statement using a 5-point rating scale of "I strongly agree", "I agree", "I'm not sure", "I disagree", or "I strongly disagree".

**Interviews and Observations**
We asked the boys in the book club what books they like to read and made a tally chart of favourite book genres and titles.

**DRA Wall**
We generated statistics on grade level reading as: “at level”, “below level”, and “above level” for all students in Grades 1-3. We assembled a DRA wall in our literacy room where we made predictions, checked out assumptions, looked at data to identify gender trends, and planned strategies to improve reading.

**Attitudes Towards Reading Materials Survey**
We surveyed boys on what types of fiction and non-fiction books they like to read (e.g.; comic books, humour, textbooks, and magazines). This was a ready-made questionnaire. Students were asked to answer using a 5-point rating scale of “I really like it”, “I like it a little”, “I don’t like it very much”, “I don’t like it at all”, or “I don’t know what it is”. We were able to use the results of this survey to select appropriate materials for the boys.
**FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?**

**Reading Attitude Survey**
- Helped us to gain a better understanding of the attitudes towards reading in each age group. As the bar graphs below indicate, Primary students had a wider range of attitudes and Junior students were, for the most part, more consistent with their attitudes towards reading.

- Helped us to gain a better understanding of the attitudes towards reading between age groups. For example, “Reading is an important activity” was significantly agreed upon more in the Junior level (13) than it was in the Primary level (4).

- The results from the survey helped our team plan the Literacy Day, Boys Literacy Night, and Boys Book Club.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

DRA Wall
- Data was based on primary classes (Grades 1-3)
- Provided data on gender-based reading levels
- We used teaching strategies to help improve DRA levels
- We initiated programs specifically targeted at boys
- Data results helped support the Boys Book Club program
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

Overall, the impact of the boys’ literacy initiative created a positive buzz in our school and community. We received positive feedback from staff, students, and community members on the quality and variety of our literacy programming.

Literacy Day and Literacy Night - Bringing our entire school together for an educational fun day. Inviting guest presenters including an author, illustrator, musician, and motivational speaker. Bringing our parents and community together and teaching them strategies to benefit their boys.

Literature Circles - Organizing professional development for our staff by inviting our Literacy Coordinator to the school to present a workshop on literature circles.

Boys Book Section in the library – Having a collection of books that boys are excited to read helps motivate students.

DRA Wall – The DRA wall helped provide insight into gender-based reading. It gave our staff a reading level benchmark, and displayed the progress of our students by comparing reading levels at the beginning and end of the school year.

As a team, we discovered the challenges and limitations of quantitative data.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
“Sticky Burr” by John Lechner
“Bone” series by Jeff Smith
“Hi! Fly Guy” by Tedd Arnold

For professional development:
“Even Hockey Players Read” by David Booth
“Quick-and-Easy Learning Games – Phonics” by Wiley Blevins

Team Member Quote:
“I believe our team was quite successful in our inquiry in that we were able to bring together our staff and educate them on this issue. We planned some very successful events for our school and we built a strong library for our boys. I am very proud of our accomplishments.”

Administrator Quote:
“As we become more knowledgeable about gender-based learning differences, having an opportunity for boys to become more engaged in their literacy learning is critical for their success.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
Book Club, Literacy Day, attitudes, library, DRA Wall
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
St. Clair Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Holy Family Catholic School — Grades JK-8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members: Doreen Edwards — Principal and Team Contact
Mark Renaud — Vice Principal
Pam Blondia — Program Resource Teacher and Team Contact
Denise Donais — District Literacy and Numeracy Teacher
Daniella Iancicello — Teacher
Kelly Soares — Teacher
Christine Sims — Teacher
Stewart Haggerty — Teacher
Lindsay Chambers — Teacher
Renée VanDamme Marcus — Teacher and Team Contact
Denise Gray — Teacher
Paul Coghe — Teacher
Janice Prangley — Teacher
Beth Fischer — Teacher
Ron Sterling — Teacher
Renée VandeVelde — Teacher
**Essential Question:** Do attitudes improve and scores increase if students are provided with opportunities to choose reading materials for their classroom library, students receive direct instruction on comprehension strategies (e.g., asking and answering questions and making inferences), and teachers receive professional development on independent reading?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

Graduates that enhance independent reading:

- Provide a wide selection of texts including high-interest, low-readability texts that appeal to boys.
- Boys’ interest in reading is maximized when their classroom libraries are sorted into genres/topics, series of books, or collections that allow them to “see what’s up” with characters they have come to care about.
- Boys need to select their own independent reading materials; however, teachers should possibly steer them towards texts that may interest them and are at appropriate independent reading levels.
- Boys need regular daily opportunities to select, read, respond to, and discuss their own reading materials. Boys willingly share new learning during other instructional blocks.
- Specifically instruct boys about how to find “just right” books at their independent reading levels. (i.e., the Five Finger Rule.). Students should track their reading by recording titles in a reading log. Some of our boys discovered that keeping a running total of the number of books read very motivating.
- Provide 20 to 30 minutes of daily and uninterrupted independent reading time.
- Focus on a reading strategy with application and practice (e.g., Question Chart, Question and Answer Relationship Chart, and graphic organizers).
- After reading, allow time for students to debrief/discuss the focus socially with a partner, small group, or whole class. Track independent reading choices. Boys are more engaged when completing response activities that provide alternatives to independent writing responses.
- Use mini-lessons to establish expectations and routines with the class. Group and individual conferences help meet students’ needs better.
- Our district Literacy Teacher benefitted us and therefore our students with on-site PD and support.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

- We introduced reading strategies explicitly during read aloud (using think aloud), practiced them during shared and guided reading, and then applied them during independent reading. We chose to focus on the reading strategy: “Effective readers ask questions before/during/after reading”.
- We shifted from unstructured DEAR time to brief, focused mini-lessons reinforcing a strategy and clarifying routines/procedures, expectations, and other components of independent reading (see work by Regie Routman).
- We conferenced with individual students during independent reading, provided boys with regular, positive feedback, and set reading goals based on observations. We planned instruction based on students’ needs. Metacognition was coached.
- We used surveys to identify students' interests, to provide direction for purchases, and to monitor changes in attitudes.
- We promoted student self-assessment and reflection (e.g., use of the Q-chart and other reading strategies).
- We capitalized on cross-curricular connections and encouraged students to explore a current topic (e.g., a non-fiction topic with exportable knowledge that appealed to boys).
- We better understand the value of independent reading and it is now prioritized in our timetables. Struggling/reluctant readers need time to engage in independent reading.

**Student Quote:**

On his first day, a grade 3 boy new to this school declared, “I hate reading and no one is going to make me like it.” When interviewed eight months later he commented, “When I first came to Holy Family Catholic School, I didn’t like reading at all. But then when I started reading books that I liked such as science books about the world and how it works, I started to like reading.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Holy Family Catholic School is a small rural school, in southwestern Ontario, with about 300 students in JK-grade 8. The community has been challenged by a steady economic downturn. Our principal noticed that many boys were pretending to read, which aligned with our EQAO results for boys’ attitudes. We also noticed that we didn’t have enough variety of interesting topics and levels in our classroom libraries to support quality independent reading sessions. We wanted to determine whether student self-selected reading materials, PD, and scaffolded reading instruction with mini-lessons during independent reading would increase engagement and overall reading scores.

As soon as the first books arrived, the excitement about reading increased. The children were thrilled to select new books to add to their classroom libraries (one book per student for each of ten months). Immediately, we could see that our boys were more interested in reading. We arranged all the classroom libraries in child-friendly bins rather than cramming the books onto book shelves. The bins were organized by genres/topics as well as levels in lower primary. This step made it much easier for our boys to select a book during independent reading time. Our classroom libraries grew and students looked forward to their monthly selections. We placed labels on the front covers naming the student who chose the book for their classroom library. Over time, teachers noticed higher engagement and increased dialogue among the boys about their reading.

Eventually, most teachers committed to 20-30 minutes of daily independent reading. Our district Literacy and Numeracy Teacher provided PD on “independent reading”. Regie Routman’s book, Reading Essentials, helped us consolidate the need to shift from unstructured DEAR time to focused and monitored independent reading time. We all read this book and shared our reflections at staff meetings. The book framed teacher dialogue and guided discussion.

Although we noticed higher student engagement, our DRA and EQAO scores indicated we needed more professional development around teaching comprehension strategies. Once again, our Literacy and Numeracy Teacher provided PD sessions, which targeted the following topics: asking questions before, during, and after reading; question and answer relationships; and making inferences and answering inferential questions.

We gathered a lot of data about boys’ reading attitudes, reading strategies utilized, reading comprehension, and preferred reading topics. Our data helped determine how to spend our money and focus our P.D. Our greatest challenge was collecting valid data to make accurate comparisons when our tools changed. For example, the revised DRA2 kit required us to time primary students’ reading rates and the EQAO results were presented differently. Our data showed that a variety of texts, consistent time for independent reading, and explicit instruction of comprehension strategies led to positive results.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

- We will continue to use strategies we found effective (i.e., daily blocks of independent reading time, log books to track engagement, mini-lessons, focus for reading, sharing/debriefing after reading, and the enticement of readers by pre-viewing highlights/content/hot topics.
- We will use reading surveys throughout the year to determine interests and attitudes and to support our decisions about what books/titles to purchase.
- We will use diagnostic/formative/summative reading strategy rubrics to monitor student progress.
- We will continue to monitor independent reading (e.g., student’s wide reading and more teacher conferences).
- We will enhance our classroom libraries with critical purchases related to students’ interests and needs.
- We will consider the incorporation of other strategies for boys’ success such as Jeff Wilhelm’s suggestions for enhancing understanding of stories (e.g., role playing, guided imagery, and snapshot drama).
- Boys need occasions for talking to others in meaningful ways about what they have read. To appeal to boys’ need for social interaction, we will use literacy circles so students can naturally converse about self-selected texts. PD and support will be provided by the district Literacy and Numeracy Teacher, as required.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“I see a difference at home — my son enjoys reading. Prior to the project, he would not touch a book. It doesn’t seem to matter the book, but as long as he has interest in the topic he will read and not even think he is actually reading. By letting him choose books of interest whether they are about football, fishing, or camping, he will read with enjoyment.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Quantitative Data: Q-Chart/QAR Summary
Effective readers ask and answer questions while reading. The Q-Chart is a graphic organizer that assists students in formulating a variety of explicit, implicit, and reflective types of questions. The QAR Chart (Question and Answer Relationship) assists in identification of the types of questions that enable students to answer them more effectively. These include: Right There, Think, and Search, and On My Own/Author and Me. We pre-tested students prior to direct instruction in January 2008. Then, we provided direct instruction during read aloud and practiced during shared and guided reading sessions. During independent reading, in order to assess their ability to apply this strategy, students were provided with these graphic organizers and were instructed to use them before, during, and after reading. Students were post-tested in May 2008. We tested only grades 3, 5, and 6 to have a sampling of students from the primary and junior divisions. For the purpose of this project, we examined only the boys’ results.

Quantitative Data: Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA)
This tool determines a student’s reading level based on reading engagement, oral fluency, and comprehension. A student reads a passage orally while the teacher takes a running record and times the student to determine the oral reading rate and fluency. The individual is asked to make predictions, read the text independently, and then answer comprehension questions that include: summarizing, literal comprehension, interpretation, reflection, and metacognition. (S)he is also asked to reflect on her/his reading engagement and reading goals. A four-leveled rubric is used to assess students in each of these areas. Depending on the individual’s developmental reading level, he or she may respond orally or in written format. We took a snapshot of data by analyzing results in a primary, junior, and intermediate class in October 2006, May 2007, and April 2008.

Quantitative Data: DRA Comprehension Profiles
We used a data sheet to capture individual student scores in each of the assessed DRA areas described above. This enabled us to group students for instruction based on specific needs and to determine whole group needs. We examined Wide Reading (captures student engagement), interpretation, and reflection answers at levels 3 or 4, in a primary, junior, and intermediate classroom. Our data reflects a comparison between May 2007 and March 2008 results.

Quantitative Data: EQAO Results
We looked at our overall EQAO results, examined our students’ performance in answering explicit and implicit questions, and reviewed the results for the EQAO attitude survey. We determined that our instructional priority for reading would be the following areas: inferencing as a reading skill; looking for, recognizing, and recording supporting detail from text and connecting it to personal experiences; understanding of a wide variety of literary forms (e.g., articles, poems, short stories, and novels); and skills for independent reading. We also wanted to provide boys and girls with reading materials from a variety of genres that interested them including news, magazine articles, and non-fiction reading materials; provide small group instruction, including guided reading and literature circles; and target individual needs.

Qualitative Data: Student Reading Attitude Summary
We surveyed our entire student population about their attitudes and reading behaviours in the 2006-07 school year and again in 2007-08. Components included: I am a good reader, I like to read, I like to read fiction/non-fiction, and I ask myself questions before/during/after reading. We organized data by gender and division (primary, junior, intermediate). It is important to note that the responses are self-reported by the students.

Qualitative Data: Teacher Independent Reading Survey Summary
We surveyed all our teachers in October 2007 and May 2008 to reflect upon current independent reading practices. Teachers were asked to reflect on components such as: structure of independent reading, daily time allotted, student tracking of books read/abandoned, how students respond before/during/after reading, establishment of teacher conferences during independent reading; boys’ engagement; types of texts that interest boys; classroom library organization; professional development needs; and benefits of this project.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Qualitative Data: Student Reading Attitude Survey

Percent of Boys Who Answered “Yes” to the following Statements – April 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self Reflection</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Junior</th>
<th>Intermediate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am a good reader</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can find a “just right” book in my classroom library</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can find a book I like in my classroom library</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Most of our boys are able to find appropriate reading material to sustain reading during independent reading blocks.
- Other data from the survey indicates that approximately 60% of our primary boys ask themselves questions before, during, and after reading, demonstrating engagement in texts.
- 71% of our boys use the Q-chart during independent reading to form questions about the texts.
- 27% more of our primary boys prefer non-fiction to fiction in the pre-test and post-test.

![Student Reading Attitude Survey: (Formulating Questions Before, During and After Reading)](chart)

Qualitative Data: Teacher Independent Reading Survey Summary Observations

The majority of our teachers now commit to daily independent reading for a minimum of 20-30 minutes. The remainder commit to four times per week. All teachers have divided their classroom libraries into genres/topics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Popular Texts for Boys by Division</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-fiction: animals, reptiles, insects, sports, dinosaurs, comics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Canadian Geographic</em> magazines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Junior</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-fiction: sports, animals, humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinness Book of World Records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventure books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hockey News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intermediate</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information books: war, athletes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hockey/sports books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texts linked to current hot topics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers now provide mini-lessons to demonstrate expected standards for responses (e.g., develop anchor charts) and establish routines/procedures (e.g., how/when to abandon a book). They also noted that students benefit from more accountability, such as faithfully maintaining a personal book log. Such accountability can also be promoted by encouraging more public sharing of post-reading vs. written reading response (e.g., reflect with a partner, book talks, and literacy circles).

When an intermediate teacher featured a handful of newspapers, magazines, graphic texts, novels, etc. on a current cross-curricular topic, boys gravitated towards these because they had been “pre-exposed” to what was available on a current area of focus or hot classroom topic. We noted that, at the intermediate level, sorting books into genres may not be enough to interest students.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Quantitative Data: Q-Chart/QAR Chart Summary – Generating Questions Before, During, and After Reading

Percent of Implicit or Reflective Questions Generated After Reading

Q-Chart/QAR Chart Summary Observations
- Originally, all primary boys formed questions at the explicit level only. After scaffolded instructional practices (i.e., mini-lessons and opportunities for practice), our primary boys formed 100% of their questions at the implicit or reflective level.
- Our junior boys showed a 50% increase in the number of implicit or reflective types of questions they generated.
- We conclude that our boys are interacting with the text on a deeper level.
- An increase of 8% of primary boys and 31% of junior boys could identify implicit and reflective types of questions correctly. We attribute this to the direct instruction of question and answer relationship dynamics.

- All primary students achieved at levels 3 or 4 in wide reading and 75% of boys achieved levels 3 or 4 in literal, interpretation, and reflection. (Note: no data is available for May 2007 due to the use of the original DRA kit which didn’t capture this data.)
- Our junior and intermediate boys made noticeable gains in wide reading (junior 25% and intermediate 33%) indicating that their classroom libraries are providing them with a variety of texts and our boys are motivated to read them during independent reading.
- No gains were noted in the interpretation and reflection portions of the assessment. This indicates a need for targeted instruction and the continued acquisition of student materials in junior and intermediate classrooms.

DRA Comparison of Students at or Above Grade Level

* No gr.5 data for 2006 available, therefore May 2007 data used

EQAO Results
- Students in grades 3 and 6 score at least 10% higher when required to answer explicit questions vs. implicit questions.
- Impact of the project is not evident in student data at this time.
- We anticipate improvement as a result of our focused direct instruction in Question and Answer Relationships. EQAO results will be available in October 2008.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS:

**Successes**
This project has helped to bring a unified focus to our instruction. Major shifts in instructional practices can occur when an entire staff is focused on a common goal, share PD, and support one another on an on-going basis through Professional Learning Communities. The staff has obtained an enduring understanding of the unique needs of boys and literacy development and, as a result, will continue to provide a scaffolded approach to direct instruction of reading strategies. We now have more boys who are interested in reading and who believe they are good readers.

We learned that securing student interest isn’t enough to impact reading comprehension. We need to explicitly model and practice effective reading strategies and monitor their application in order to make sound next-step instructional decisions.

**Challenges**
When gathering our data over a period of time, DRA practices changed for primary leveled readers. We now use the revised DRA 2 kit, which takes into consideration a reader’s oral reading rate. Students are now timed to determine their reading rate. In the previous year(s), using the original DRA kit, this was determined by the assessor’s subjective opinion. As a result, some of our students had been placed at instructional levels that were too high. We now have a more accurate way of determining fluency, so some students have moved down in DRA levels. This creates a challenge for examining changes over time. The interpretation and reflection components of reading comprehension will need to be a continued focus for instruction as the data shows our students have room for improvement.

EQAO data is a trailing indicator; therefore, the impact of this project may be more readily observed in the future as teacher and student understandings consolidate and progress (e.g., how to answer implicit questions).

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

**For Boys:**
- Wildcats, McGraw-Hill, Wright Group – high interest, low readability, content connections
- Top Ten: Scholastic
- Bold Print Magazines: Thompson Nelson
- Non-fiction texts at a variety of reading levels
- Fiction books in series such as *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen and *Narnia* by C.W. Lewis

**For professional development:**
- *Reading Essentials: The Specifics You Need to Teach Reading Well* by Regie Routman
- *Comprehensive Literacy Resource for Grades 1-2 and 3- 6 Teachers* by Miriam P. Trehearne
- *Me Read? No Way!* — Ontario Ministry of Education
- *Guide To Effective Instruction in Reading: Kindergarten to Grade 3* — Ontario Ministry of Education

**Team Member Quote:**
“The positive outcomes of this initiative are amazing. Hodgepodge classroom libraries have transformed to organized collections which reflect student interests. Time once spent on trying to find books for students and making them read is now available for reading conferences. Teacher dissatisfaction with DEAR time has transformed into purposeful teaching time which is reflected upon and modified in response to student needs. Boys who once pretended to read eagerly recommend an author, series, or favourite text. Our boys are immersed in literacy and they love it!” — Program

**Administrator Quote:**
“Reading empowers, awakens, develops, and inspires growth for every person who takes it up. The Holy Family Catholic School community of parents, students, and staff do a phenomenal job of promoting and supporting daily reading in all curriculum areas for all grade levels. It is a joy to watch students blossom as they gain confidence through reading. The excitement in the children’s voices when they receive their new books or magazines is always a wonderful experience. However, the ultimate is when a child wants to share what he or she has read with me or their peers.” — Principal

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
- boys;
- independent reading;
- choice;
- improvement;
- reading engagement
Final School Report: 2008
Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Hornepayne Roman Catholic Separate School

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Holy Name of Jesus School - Grades JK-6

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Laurie MacEachern (Principal)
Essential Question:
Will the implementation of a balanced literacy program focused on boys’ interests increase achievement levels in reading?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- We found that monthly learning community meetings allowed us to examine and discuss effective instructional approaches and learning experiences.

- We found it effective when all staff worked together on teaching strategies such as read alouds, shared reading, guided reading and independent reading to improve boys' literacy skills.

- We learned that literacy blocks indicating the amount of time spent on each component of a balanced literacy program was valuable when reporting and tracking boys' literacy skills.

- We found that guided reading groups must reflect students with similar abilities and needs in order for students to be successful.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

- Staff worked collaboratively to improve boys' reading skills.

- PLC meetings were established.

- Discussion around teachers' successes with boys' reading (what works and, if not, what to do differently).

Student Quote:
“Miss, I can read!”

“I love this book; can I take it home and read it to my Dad?”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

-Continue to monitor boys’ learning.

-Continue to use PLC meetings to discuss our results and to further develop our skills and concepts, with which we want our students to succeed.

-Staff will continue to encourage collaborative student interaction (oral language).

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“Mom, I can read this to you! Sure, let's do it.”

“My child has really developed a joy for reading!”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

As a result of the Boys' Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project, we have developed a very sophisticated data wall. Our data wall:

- displays CTBS, DRA, and EQAO test results and report card grades and focuses on areas of need and student success stories;

- is available for all staff to view and update at any time;

- is visited monthly to discuss where we need to improve;

- has a focus on students at risk; and,

- enables all staff to engage in discussion around the impact of our teaching on boys.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Our data does indicate that our boys have improved.

CTBS scores have improved significantly - as of June 2007:
- 72% of Grade 1 students are achieving above grade level
- 67% of Grade 2 students are achieving above grade level
- 75% of Grade 3 students are achieving above grade level
- 66% of Grade 5 students are achieving above grade level
- 100% of Grade 6 students are achieving above grade level
- 100% of Grade 7 students are achieving above grade level
- 100% of Grade 8 students are achieving above grade level

DRA scores have improved significantly - as of June 2008:
- 100% of Grade 1 students are achieving DRA standards
- 83% of Grade 2 students are achieving DRA standards
- 71% of Grade 3 students are achieving DRA standards
- 75% of Grade 4 students are achieving DRA standards
- 100% of Grade 5 students are achieving DRA standards
- 100% of Grade 6 students are achieving DRA standards

Report card grades are remaining the same with some evidence of an increase in Reading and Writing achievement.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

- There was a great impact on all of the participating teachers.
- Teachers held PLC meetings every two months.
- It is evident that all staff are very interested in helping all of our students achieve their potential.
- We came to realize that meeting regularly and discussing all students and teaching techniques proved to be very beneficial for all staff and students in Reading and Writing.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- Momentum Literacy in Motion Series - It is a guided reading and writing program for students K-6.
- DK Readers Series - It is a fiction and non-fiction series with amazing illustrations and great colour photographs.

For professional development:
- Me Read? No Way!
- Reading Magic
- The Gift of Reading
- Using Data to Improve Student Learning

Team Member Quote:
“Boys really do enjoy reading when they are interested in what they are reading!”
“I love watching the boys interact and actually discuss what they are reading!”

Administrator Quote:
“This has been a very worthwhile experience for the staff and students.”
“The whole school really came together and I believe that everyone has developed a new improved attitude towards boys and reading.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes: reading, balanced literacy program, data wall, PLC meetings, boys’ interests
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Halton Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Holy Rosary School — Grades 1-8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members
Erin Scannell — Grade 1 teacher
Rosaleen Wright — Grade 1 teacher
Kristina Zekic — Grade 3 teacher
Cheri Depelsmaeker — Grade 5 teacher
Lisa Beagle — Grade 7 teacher
John Dinner — Grade 8 teacher
Emi Bakaic — Vice-Principal
Carol Cowan — Principal

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
Essential Question: How will we engage boys in reading and increase their achievement in comprehension and critical thinking skills through the use of literature that makes connections to their personal interests and activities?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Read Aloud is a crucial part of literacy instruction because it exposes students to different genres and authors. Read Aloud can be effectively linked to Think Alouds and gives teachers a chance to authentically tell students what the brain does as good readers read, namely use various comprehension strategies.

- We feel that sharing the secrets of comprehension, in short, well planned moments of explicit instruction, are very effective in leading students toward increased responsibility and independence. Think Aloud lessons allow teachers to make cross-curricular connections and model comprehension strategies. In younger grades especially, Think Alouds provide repeated shared learning opportunities which, over time, lead students toward increased independence.

- Choice is absolutely necessary in order to increase boys’ engagement in the reading process. We received the message loudly and clearly, especially from our junior and intermediate students, that self-selection of reading materials is essential and gives them a feeling of control over what they are reading. This allows students to let their personal interests guide what they are reading, rather than the teacher deciding what they will read. The infusion of resources we purchased in the first year of this inquiry project clearly showed us that boys like graphic novels, magazines, newspapers, and informational print. In the last year especially, our school library has brought many of these types of reading materials into circulation. Students are more excited about visiting the library and signing books out when they are interested in the materials available.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

One of the most profound changes to our instructional and assessment practices is that we now see these two as inseparably connected. Instead of seeing assessment as a chore that we need to complete, we see it as the motor that drives our instruction and the GPS that tells us where we need to go with each of our students.

Assessment
We have the standard assessment tools (DRA, QCA, OCA, EQAO) which are mandated at certain times of the school year. These tools, as well as regular collection of other data, both qualitative and quantitative, show us exactly where our students are and whether they are moving forward.

Instructional
The use of S.M.A.R.T. goals has greatly impacted our instructional practices. We use our data to drive our precision teaching and to target specific students and their needs with specific teaching strategies and materials. Reassessing after a period of six to eight weeks informs us about the effectiveness of chosen teaching strategies and materials and begins the cycle anew.

Student Quote:
“I personally don’t like to read novels, but I can pick up a magazine or something that interests me.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

The focus of our inquiry project has been on increasing achievement and comprehension beginning early in 2006. We received a substantial amount of money in the first year and spent most of it on resources we felt would be motivating and engaging for our struggling male readers. These resources were received very positively by our boys. We still see exposure to and availability of a variety of engaging resources for our boys as a very integral part of our success. Starting with our grade 1 students who can’t get enough of non-fiction material about dolphins and insects through to our intermediate boys who would rather read a car manual than any novel, choice and variety are of paramount importance. It doesn’t matter what they read, it just matters that they’re reading.

During the second year of our inquiry project, we focused our attention on: (1) certain comprehension strategies, (2) how we asked our boys to respond to their reading, and (3) the role that data played in helping us move our students forward.

The item analysis of EQAO results showed us that students were struggling with making connections and inferences. We targeted these problems with precision teaching and assessed our students regularly to find out if they were improving.

We also made more use of graphic organizers and oral activities to give boys more interesting and meaningful ways of demonstrating their learning. We found that the less we relied on paper-and-paper responses, the more engaged the students were in the act of reading. We devoted longer periods of time to uninterrupted reading and found that, for most students, it was the most treasured time of the day.

Towards the end of our second year, but especially during this third and final year of the project, data has become the driving force behind what we do in our classrooms with all of our students, but especially our struggling readers. We use both qualitative and quantitative data across all grade levels and tailor our teaching to our students’ specific needs. When a teaching strategy isn’t working, we know it isn’t working because our data tells us. Frequent assessment tells us what works and what doesn’t work for all of our students. Data makes us accountable as professionals and helps us increase the literacy achievement of our struggling male readers, as well as the rest of our students.

Collaboration has helped us grow as professionals and as a Professional Learning Community. Our students are students of every staff member, not just the teacher who greets them at the door each morning. Shared learning and responsibility creates common language, common goals, and helps us work toward increasing the literacy achievement of all our students.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

We plan to continue using regular assessment and S.M.A.R.T. goals next year and in the years to come. We will assess our identified “at risk” students in late September and begin the S.M.A.R.T. goal cycle, which is:

- Assessment of “at risk” students
- Post data on a data wall
- Analyze data and set S.M.A.R.T. goal (data informs instructional direction, teaching strategies, and materials)
- Re-assess and begin cycle anew

We consider Professional Learning Communities as an essential part of our growth as educators. As well as working with the teachers in our divisions, we have built a P.L.C. as a team that will continue. We have learned so much from each other over the three years of this inquiry project that we would have difficulty not continuing as a team. Together, as a team, we will continue to build capacity in literacy instruction and assessment.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“My 8- and 13-year-old boys both enjoy reading factual books such as Guinness Books or books about weird facts. They also prefer to read magazines. In the last two years, my 13-year-old has started to enjoy reading novels. I find it challenging to find novels that interest him. They don’t complain about what they have to read in school. I think that is because there are so many ‘boy’ book choices now and they are encouraged to read what they like, as long as they are reading and comprehending.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Grade 4 and Grade 5 Data Wall

*Reaching Readers Quick Comprehension Assessment* published by Pearson Education Canada, Inc. is the tool we used for assessing reading comprehension in junior grades. We targeted “at-risk” students, whose overall achievements were Level 2 or lower and administered the assessment three times this school year. The first assessment data was collected in October, 2007 for Term 1; the next in December at the beginning of Term 2; and the final at the beginning of Term 3.

We analyzed the data each time and then constructed S.M.A.R.T. goals based on the results. Within the S.M.A.R.T. goal framework, we established a literacy goal, which targeted a specific number of students and focused on a specific reading strategy (e.g., making connections). We formulated an Action Plan, which outlined specific instructional strategies that would realize the literacy goal(s). In addition, the instructional strategies informed professional learning sessions with teachers and the Itinerant Literacy Teacher. At the end of each cycle, students were reassessed to measure the effectiveness of the explicit instructional strategies.

Our teaching strategy focus was making connections based on previous EQAO scores and our inquiry focus strategy was synthesizing.

We collected data for eight “at-risk” students in grade 4 and posted it for each term. During Term 2, two of the students were identified and working from an I.E.P. They were not included in the last two assessments. The tables below show the results. The grade 4 data wall indicates some improvement in both synthesizing and making connections.

### SYNTHESIZING: GRADE 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Term 1</th>
<th>Term 2</th>
<th>Term 3</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
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### MAKING CONNECTIONS: GRADE 4

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<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Term 2</th>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The tables below show the results for 10 “at-risk” students in grade 5. The grade 5 data wall also shows improvements in both synthesizing and making connections.

The data indicates that significant improvement was made in making connections. For Term 1, there were five students at Level 1 and in Terms 2 and 3, there were none. Also, for Term 1, there was only one student at Level 3 and in Term 3, there were five students at Level 3.

### SYNTHESIZING: GRADE 5

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<th></th>
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### MAKING CONNECTIONS: GRADE 5

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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Data Walls can create more awareness among teachers about weaknesses in comprehension strategies and hopefully help “at-risk” students from falling through the cracks by providing strategic comprehension instruction. Data Walls can also help teachers see the need to plan with a team approach, and share best practices that helped those students who showed improvement in their reading comprehension strategies. Having this information at the beginning of each year helps teachers focus much faster when planning their reading programs.

Our “at-risk” students in grade 1 were not comprehending their reading material because they were struggling to decode the words. We set a S.M.A.R.T. goal to focus on increasing their sight word vocabulary through the use of games, word family activities, onset and rime activities, and flashcards. We assessed their sight word vocabulary monthly to ensure they were consistently reading learned words. As shown in the chart below, the increased sight word vocabulary translated into increased DRA levels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 1 Student</th>
<th>Feb. 2008 DRA Level</th>
<th>May 2008 DRA Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

The following data is based on an oral response question we added to the Diagnostic Reading Assessment (DRA), which specifically targets understanding in the area of critical thinking. We added this question because we felt the DRA was lacking critical thinking questions.

In the charts below, students A, B, and C are grade 3 students.

The data shows an overall improvement in the quality of the students' critical thinking. Each student has included more detail in his/her responses and made more relevant references to the text. The most significant improvement was for Student A, who began to make connections to text by relating the ideas in the text to her own knowledge and experiences (see May 2008 assessment).

**QUESTION: Why do you think the author wrote this story?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Cycle Date</th>
<th>DRA Text and Level</th>
<th>Student A’s Oral Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseline October 2007</td>
<td>The Wonderful Day, Level 24</td>
<td>To teach kids how to share.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2007</td>
<td>From Peanuts to Peanut Butter, Level 28</td>
<td>To tell us about peanut butter, how it’s made and what to do with it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2008</td>
<td>Touchdown, Level 30</td>
<td>To tell us not to judge a book by its cover or to judge a person on whether they’re a boy or a girl. The first time I played with a group of boys I judged them. I thought it wouldn’t be fun but it was and I play with them all the time now.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Cycle Date</th>
<th>DRA Text and Level</th>
<th>Student B’s Oral Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseline October 2007</td>
<td>The Wonderful Day, Level 24</td>
<td>The author wanted kids to have an easy story to read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2007</td>
<td>Incredible Journeys: Animal Migration, Level 28</td>
<td>Some people may not know about migration but by reading this book they can find out how animals migrate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2008</td>
<td>Touchdown, Level 30</td>
<td>You shouldn’t doubt a girl. Football is not just a boy’s sport. It can be a girl’s sport too.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Cycle Date</th>
<th>DRA Text and Level</th>
<th>Student C’s Oral Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseline October 2007</td>
<td>You Don’t Look Beautiful to Me, Level 28</td>
<td>So people learn not to call people names and know that everyone is beautiful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2007</td>
<td>From Peanuts to Peanut Butter, Level 28</td>
<td>To show people how peanut butter is made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2008</td>
<td>Be Nice to Josephine, Level 34</td>
<td>You can’t judge a person if you don’t know what they like to do or how they are.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

“Working in the Boys’ Literacy group has helped me focus carefully on data collection in the classroom. It has highlighted the necessity and benefit of early intervention for ‘at-risk’ students.” — Rosaleen Wright, Grade 1 teacher

“I began this three year journey as a grade 6 teacher and finished as a grade 1 teacher. As such, I know how important it is for children to be capable readers and critical thinkers. This year, I realized that assessment is my friend, one of the most important and telling tools I have to pinpoint where my young learners are and where I need to take them. I agree with Karen Hune that, “Without data, it’s just an opinion.” With planned teaching strategies and materials, and subsequent reassessment, I know whether my teaching is working for my students and meeting their individual needs. This learning cycle is very empowering, making me a more effective teacher and, more importantly, helping my students achieve to the best of their abilities.” — Erin Scannell, Grade 1 teacher

“This project helped me actively use the S.M.A.R.T. model as a way to improve and target my instruction and to give support and aid to my ‘at-risk’ students. The S.M.A.R.T. goals I focused on targeted “fluency”. Through the consistent use of Reader’s Theatre and intensive daily timed reading with my ‘at-risk’ students, I consolidated my understanding of how comprehension cannot take place until an adequate fluency rate has been established. Most importantly, I saw a dramatic increase in reading engagement among these students. Increased fluency impacts reading engagement.” — Kristina Zekic, Grade 3 teacher

“This project showed me that having great literature geared to students’ interests is the key to helping them become lifelong lovers of reading. Reading aloud and talking about good reading strategies made a difference in students’ interest and engagement. Watching kids sneak a book in their desk to read while I was teaching another subject really didn’t upset me! If we could get all students engaged and interested, we wouldn’t need the data walls!” — Cheri Depelsmaeker, Grade 5

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- Boldprint magazines
- Variety of non-fiction and informational print on topics such as: animals, sports, cars, ‘how-to’ manuals, ‘gross’ factor, and almanacs/statistics

For professional development:
- The Power of Retelling by Vicki Benson and Carrice Cummins
- Strategies that Work by Harvey and Goudvis
- When Kids Can’t Read What Teachers Can Do by Kylene Beers

Team Member Quote:
“Starting where the students are in terms of their strengths and needs, examining the data results, and setting literacy goals to drive instruction has made the difference between ‘getting close’ and improving student learning with greater precision.”

Administrator Quote:
“The Boys’ Literacy initiative has had many positive results. The boys’ results on assessments have risen overall. By taking the team approach with a specific focus; i.e., Boys’ Literacy, it has provided a vehicle to create change successfully. This has resulted in changes in teacher instruction which better suited students’ learning styles. The school has had the benefit also of increased literacy resources. Being a part of this endeavor has been a pleasure and an opportunity for self-growth.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
- engagement
- data
- assessment
- critical thinking
- S.M.A.R.T. goals
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Superior North Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Holy Saviour School – Grades K-8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Denise Paris-Brown
Tania Watson
Caroline Burk
Clayton McCarthy
Essential Question: Will integrating drama activities into classroom programs increase boys’ reading scores from pre-intervention assessment to post-intervention assessment? Will integrating drama activities into classroom language programs improve boys’ reading attitudes?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

We found the following improve boys’ literacy skills:
• non-fiction reading resources;
• oral language activities such as Inside/Outside Circle, Think/Pair/Share, Put Yourself on the Line, and Rally Robin;
• Tableaux;
• role playing (e.g., scientists, news broadcasters);
• uninterrupted blocks of reading time;
• writing about weird and strange phenomena (e.g., creating a class copy of Ripley’s Believe it or Not);
• Readers’ Theatre;
• literature circles; and

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

Instructional Practices
We are now incorporating more oral language activities in the classrooms allowing students to discuss what they have read before they embark on assigned comprehension tasks. We give our students more opportunities to explain themselves via conferencing or dramatizing acquired knowledge.

Student Quote:
“I understand and remember better what I read about when I act it out or watch someone else act it out.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?
We had noticed that the boys in our school lacked motivation in reading and writing; so, we decided to take advantage of the incredible opportunity the Boys’ Teacher Inquiry Project offered. A school team wrote the proposal three years ago. Our plan was to actively engage the boys in the reading and writing process.

We included drama activities in our classrooms. Many of these drama activities were provided by Dr. Larry Swartz who visited us in Northwestern Ontario.

This project has resulted in strong partnerships among colleagues and a sharing of resources and successful strategies. Staff discussions regarding reading materials appropriate for boys were rewarding. We discovered that if we were to actively engage our boys in the literacy process, we would have to supplement our current reading programs with cartoons, graphic novels, lyrics, magazines, poems, and fact-filled books.

Our most memorable event was the project launching activity, which was a community scavenger hunt. Our entire school community – students, teachers, and parents – worked together to follow a list of clues that included reading books, menus, flyers, and signs.

With all the literacy and numeracy initiatives, we found it a challenge to meet on a consistent basis; however, pockets of teachers met to discuss strategies and successful practices. Another challenge was disaggregating the data. We decided to use the data to inform our instructional practices, however; it was a challenge to decide what area to focus on first.

We learned that boys require simple instructions and engaging topics that are meaningful to them. For them, opportunities to talk and move around should be part of daily instruction. A variety of texts should be readily available in classrooms and within close proximity to students. Relevant reading resources are necessary to engage

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

In reflecting on our project, we now believe that we should have included more than one whole-school activity. The scavenger hunt was met with such enthusiasm that it would have been rewarding to include several of these magnificent whole-school celebrations throughout the project. The momentum it created in generating student and parent engagement was phenomenal. We are also looking at our school’s reading assessment tool for grades 4 to 8 and wondering if we should be using a better tool. Discussions have occurred as a result of this project as we are now thinking that students have become systematic in completing different components of the assessment.

We now realize that we should have planned for professional learning via videos, reading, or webcasts when we met. Professional learning communities should have been deliberately planned and systematically scheduled to

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“The scavenger hunt was really fun. Everyone was able to participate. We received lovely, lovely books. The comic books really caught my eye. The global warming and natural disaster series are fitting. The projects that unfolded from the reading material were phenomenal.”

teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca  This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?
DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Quantitative Data
Canadian Achievement Test (CAT)
Developmental Reading Assessment

These quantitative data sources allowed us to gather information related to reading fluency, rate, and comprehension scores. We graphed CAT scores according to grade equivalency and language and reading scores. We graphed the DRA scores according to reading engagement, oral reading, comprehension skills, and total score. We studied the boys born in 1994. Through the use of bar graphs, we compared data over the past three years.

Qualitative Data
Reading Attitude Survey

We administered a Reading Attitude Survey to the boys at the beginning and end of the project. We used a rating scale. Some of the questions we asked included: “You like to read a book whenever you have free time.”, “You would read more if you could choose your own reading material.”, and “You are willing to tell people that you do not like to read.”.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

DRA – Total Scores
Boys made the greatest gains from fall 2006 through fall 2007.

As we considered the improved results, we took several factors into account. First, the students have been taught by the same teacher for two consecutive years. This may have resulted in greater improvement because the teacher had already determined the needs of her students in June of the previous year. As well, familiarity with the drama techniques and strategies used in previous years enabled her to determine which ones would best suit the group. It is very difficult to pinpoint if the drama techniques implemented throughout the literacy block, as well as in the content areas, were directly responsible for the increase in overall scores, or if other techniques and strategies new to the classroom also played a role. Teachers are constantly implementing new strategies to improve student learning and it is therefore difficult to attribute student growth to one particular practice.

DRA – Comprehension Skills
We were surprised that none of the boys’ comprehension skills improved. At the present time, our school requires that we report on one fiction and one non-fiction Developmental Reading Assessment per year. This may have resulted in lower comprehension scores for some of the boys. To improve the validity of our results, we now realize that we should have administered similar text types (all non-fiction vs. fiction) during our three year study.

DRA – Oral Reading Scores
There were no significant increases in oral fluency reading scores. In fact, the scores either decreased or remained the same. However, the teacher felt that her students had improved even though DRA scores did not show improvement. She believes that the reading instructional strategies had a positive impact on fluency. DRA does not allow for any introduction of difficult vocabulary or “before reading” tasks. We believe that daily systematic oral reading strategies while we were administering the DRA would show better alignment between DRA and classroom scores. Some form of classroom assessment results should have been gathered as baseline and culminating data.

CAT – Total Reading Scores
Each boy in the study showed an increase in total reading CAT scores. Total reading scores include the areas of: stated information, main ideas, critical assessment, information management, and sentence and paragraph structures. According to CAT data, our boys demonstrated continuous progress in comprehending and analysing text.

Reading Attitude Survey
Results of the Reading Attitude Survey indicated a positive improvement in the boys' attitudes towards reading in general – 30% more boys stated at the end of the project that they enjoyed reading that did at the beginning. When questioned as to why they changed their minds about enjoying reading, they commented on the bigger selection of reading materials. Reading materials such as graphic novels, sports magazines, world record books, and animal stories topped their list of favorites.

Opportunities to discuss and share their reading selections with their peers was also a favorite activity that boys
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

As educators, we see the incredible benefits of working as teams. The rich discussion that results when teachers gather is a terrific method to deliver professional development. We only wish that we had opportunities to use the LNS and ministry resources throughout the project. It was not unusual to see teachers gathered in stairwells and halls at the end of the day to discuss best practices. The project has also helped to create teacher leadership throughout the school. The shift from being told how to go about a project and what to do specifically was a positive opportunity for teachers. Undertaking this project was not mandated, but encouraged. Because of this, teachers were able to persevere with the project and stay focussed on the task at hand. It wasn’t met with resentment because everyone shared in acquiring resources.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Reaching Readers
Ripley’s Believe it or Not

For professional development:
Drama Themes by Larry Swartz
Strategies that Work (Revised) by Harvey and Goudvis
Teaching Reading with Think Aloud Lessons by Laura Robb

Team Member Quote:
“Watching the boys act something out or demonstrate their learning through drama leaves me wondering if I should incorporate these strategies in math and science. The growth in student engagement is noticeable.”

Administrator Quote:
“The boys action research project highlighted the importance of promoting literacy among boys. It also helped everyone to recognize the interest levels of boys and to implement strategies to improve that interest.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
drama; engagement; professional development; literacy; boys
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Toronto Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Holy Spirit - Primary and Junior
St. Kevin - Primary and Junior
St. Marguerite Bourgeoys - Primary and Junior

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Primary and Junior teachers
Vernon Sweeney
Cathy Fielding
Carla Marchetti
Patrick Keyes
Peggy Bergin
Lina Bruchowsky
Mary Koppel
Margaret Quinn
Tanaya Chami
John Mascerelli
Maya Unger
Genny Johns
Ken Dent
Tom Shanahan
Wilma Simmons
Jennifer Fell
Anthony Laface
Debbie Baillargeon
JoEllen Fenton
Michelle Baskie
Paula Morra
Graziella Sestito
Lisette Lewis
**Essential Question:**
To what extent do specific instructional strategies and classroom materials that affirm boys' literacies improve (affect) their motivation and achievement in grades 3 to 6?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

1. Need to choose materials with formats that have immediate appeal to boys.
   - Specifically, we found that boys gravitated towards a multigenre approach: magazines, graphic novels (short text with pictures), charts, and technical manuals.
   - Boys respond to interactive computer generated reading materials and find it appealing to use computer technology to compose.
   - Boys like colour/variety of print – they are more aware of textual features.
   - Boys tend to like succinct works.

2. Boys benefit from the gradual release of responsibility model.

3. Distraction decreases when level of engagement increases.

4. Boys need prior learning activities to become engaged in reading.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

1. Created a variety of methods to activate prior knowledge.

2. Assessed the prior knowledge of students.

3. Gave boys several ways to respond – orally, using computer, graphic forms (charts, mind mapping, story webs).

4. Modelled 'think aloud'.

5. Emphasized making predictions/drawing inferences. (For example; predicting content from text features.)

6. Need to continue in Junior Division with what are traditionally viewed as ‘Primary Division strategies’ such as think alouds, reader theatre, guided reading, making connections, and self-selected reading.

**Student Quote:**
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Together we worked to improve our understanding of motivation to read. When there is a concerted effort of professional development with a key purpose to improve boys’ reading, gains are made. We found that, when working as three partner schools, we had access to more rich ideas and had deeper dialogue. Also, there is more opportunity for sharing of resources and materials – including professional resources and student resources.

Some of the impediments to creating this professional learning environment were significant changes in staffing. For example one school has had three principals in three years, and the Professional Learning Teacher was re-assigned. A number of staff retired or transferred from the school.

Creating a focus for the project was a challenge.

There were challenges in the schools being aware of the scope of the project, particularly in the first two years. The question of stable funding was problematic. We had been lead to believe that funds for resources would arrive each of the three years. It would be fair to say that learning in the second year of the project that no resources would be allocated caused a dip in morale and interest among staff.

Keeping the goal alive as well as the motivation of the staff is challenging in a culture where there are competing goals and province wide, local and board initiatives (safe schools, SMART goals, School plan (board and provincial), OFIP, Health and Safety, MISA, major construction, audits, EQAO, CAT testing, report cards, religion testing, RAD testing, C-CAT, staffing models, IPRC’s, teaching learning cycle….. ). Balancing the day to day operations of the school with long term goals is a significant challenge.

There is a lot of trial and error. Creating a comfort zone where teachers are sharing requires team building and collaborative work.

The numbers in one school are quite small – so we need to question the statistical significance of the quantitative data.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

Parent/Guardian Quote:
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

1. Reading logs and reading journals. We have established and increased the use of reading logs and reading journals that students employ to write about their thoughts and impressions of the format, character, content, and plot.

2. EQAO data. We can disaggregate the data more effectively according to gender.

3. We are also using more kinds of data from greater sources—formal and informal.

Looking at ongoing teacher data, we have seen the following trends:

- In one school, 50% of the boys indicated they enjoyed a book because of the colourful photographs.
- In a second school, 40% of the boys stated in their reading journals that they liked the “bawdy humour”.
- In the third school, 75% of the boys indicated a strong interest in the action/sports genre reading materials.
- In all three schools, the initial study of student public library card ownership was 28%. The May 2008 survey indicated that 67% of the Primary-Junior students have obtained a student public library card.

This information was determined through a highlighted review of the student reading journals.

CAT/3 assessment results for language indicated moderate improvement for grade 2 language compared to grade 5 language for the sample students (those students who were in their resident schools for both grade 2 and grade 5 CAT/3 assessments) over the three year program. One participant school found that their student sample was very small, and, therefore, not a fair representation.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Our data shows that the strategies described in this report are contributing to literacy improvements for our boys. In fact, as an extension for our future programming, we seek to determine if these same strategies will yield literacy improvements for our girls.

We found that our past practices may have compromised our holistic understanding of data and reporting. Through this study, we became more aware of the Learning Skills of boys when compared with girls and discovered that our boys were less engaged in their learning. We then investigated the Learning Skills on the students’ report cards and summarized the results for boys in “homework completion”, “initiative”, “class participation”, “problem solving”, and “independent work”. The results for the girls’ Learning Skills were summarized for comparison purposes, and we found the following:

INDEPENDENT WORK

- Junior grade boys (gr 4-6) — 8% received EXCELLENT; Junior grade girls (gr 4-6) — 19% received EXCELLENT
- Junior grade boys (gr 4-6) — 6% received NEEDS IMPROVEMENT; Junior grade girls (gr 4-6) — 1% received NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

A year later

- boys (school wide) — 19% received EXCELLENT; girls (school wide) — 35% received EXCELLENT
- boys (school wide) — 16% received NEEDS IMPROVEMENT; girls (school wide) — 6% received NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

CLASS PARTICIPATION

- boys (school wide) — 17% received EXCELLENT; girls (school wide) — 38% received EXCELLENT
- boys (school wide) — 9% received NEEDS IMPROVEMENT; girls (school wide) — 7% received NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

The on-going use and analysis of data is “like a trail through the leaves”. “One thing that teacher action researchers have discovered is that they often don’t have a sense of what they should have collected at the start of their project until they are well into their research.”(Ruth Hubbard) This rings true for us in our three schools.

Through this experience, we have recognized that data collection “must be realistic to fit into the work patterns of the school otherwise the process becomes cumbersome.”(Lynne Hannay)
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

The impact of the inquiry on us as educators highlights the tremendous benefits of working collaboratively in professional learning networks. Furthermore, we have greater appreciation for the scope and constructive impact of the use of data.

Teachers have a keener awareness of the distinct learning styles/natures of students (including the gender noted differences) from this study, and the teachers’ role in empowering boys to higher levels of literacy success.

All educational support personnel – including educational assistants, librarians, resource teachers, and homeroom teachers – have a sense of greater accountability for the learning success of all students.

Data binders have been created in our schools to create informed dialogue among staff to assist with data driven decision making.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:

Word Works Rigby Literacy; Power Zone Magazines Thomson Nelson; Boldprint Library Pack Thomson Nelson; Moving Up With Literacy Place Scholastic; Boys Sports Pack Best Collection Thomson Nelson; Word Works Phonics Package Thomson Nelson; Skyrider Investigations 3 Collections Thomson Nelson; Guinness World Records Guinness

For professional development:


Team Member Quote:
Initial project quote: “Boys can read. What do we do about goals?”

Closing project quote: “We feel like we’ve just begun, and we’re ready to continue.”

Administrator Quote:
“It took us quite a while to put our goal into the day-to-day operation of the classroom. We had to make it ‘real’ for us — make it meaningful.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
Boys’ Literacy; Data; Professional Development; Motivation to Read; Reason to Read
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Avon-Maitland District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Howick Central Public School ~ Grades 4, 5 and 6

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:

Over the past three years, team members have included:

Darcy Herrfort (2005-08)
Heather Eckert (2005-08)
Naomi Martin (2007-08)
Darlene Fisk (2007-08)
Greg McLean (2007-08)
Mark Campbell (2005-06)
Rennie Alexander (2005-07)
Annette Lindsay (2005-07)

teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca
This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
Essential Question:
Will boys’ writing skills improve if their interest in reading is increased by the use of best teaching strategies for reading?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

• Effective instructional strategies are essential in order to positively affect students’ attitudes.

• Grouping students according to gender allows them to participate with fewer inhibitions and helps to improve their attitudes.

• Effective professional collaboration is key to ensuring consistency and focussed instruction within a division.

• Boys’ attitudes toward reading are easier to improve than boys’ achievement in writing.

• Improving boys’ attitudes toward reading is not enough to significantly impact writing achievement, at least not over a short time period.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?
• We altered the make up of our classroom environment (e.g., displaying books with covers facing out; improving access to books; increasing the number of books in the classroom; including more non-fiction and series choices).
• We developed and implemented anchor charts for various learning behaviours and skills.
• We developed common rubrics, routinely moderated students’ work, and collaborated regularly as a

Student Quote:
“I really like the literacy program because we have better books and it makes reading more fun.”

“I really liked how those authors (and one illustrator) came in [to the school] and we got to pick books for the library.”

teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Howick Central Public School is situated in southwestern Ontario. Our students come from small rural farming communities where a strong work ethic is valued.

In the first year of our inquiry project, we focussed on differentiating our reading classes by gender. We separated all students in grades 4 to 6 into male and female classes with teachers of corresponding gender. Staff and students alike looked forward to these classes each day. For the boys, it was an opportunity to express themselves freely and, for the teachers, it was an opportunity to explore subjects of interest to each gender. We drummed up enthusiasm for reading by purchasing many new books, especially non-fiction books and books with male-oriented themes. We hosted several male authors to present to our students and separated the audiences by gender. We also held a book fair where students were given tickets to purchase two new books for our school library. We opened up a new book section in the library and a book plate was placed in the front of each book, stating the name of the student who had chosen it.

In our second year, we faced a number of changes. First, for a number of logistical reasons, we were no longer able to implement gender differentiated classes. However, we did carry on with author presentations by male role models with gender differentiated audiences and we allowed the new grade 4 students to purchase books for our library. In addition, one of our key team members left to teach at another school.

In our third year, our team members changed significantly. Two members left and two new members joined. Our junior division was, in a sense, re-invented. However, the new team worked very well together. One of the challenges we faced was looking for a way to integrate our OFIP initiatives with our essential question for the Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry. By looking at writing, as well as reading, we were able to integrate the two.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

We found that the essential question we posed for this past year was rather convoluted and we struggled to maintain focus. We collected a great deal of data, which we found to be overwhelming. For the purposes of the project, we narrowed the scope of the data.

Next year, by refining our focus, we will gather data that is more specific to our initiatives. We will continue to implement effective teaching strategies to foster greater interest in reading. In addition, we will place an emphasis on teaching effective writing strategies geared to non-fiction writing. We will continue to maintain regular, purposeful division meetings to promote collaboration and guide our teaching.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“My son is more interested in reading and enjoys reading more, as he has power over his choice of books.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Qualitative Data

Over the three years of this study, we made a number of professional observations. First, we observed that using gender differentiated classrooms generated enthusiasm for reading among students of both genders. The students looked forward to their classes, were excited about their reading, and were thrilled with their new books. Second, we found that the students were delighted to choose books for the library and eagerly searched for their personal choices, which displayed their names inside the front covers.

This past year, we have noticed an enthusiasm for reading among most of the students. They request more time for reading, they are quiet and focussed when doing independent reading and, sometimes, they read when they should be focussed on other classroom activities. These observations lead us to conclude that our students’ interest in reading has increased.

Quantitative Data

We collected the following quantitative data:

- Report card data from terms 1 and 2 related to writing achievement - This data was connected to our essential question and was the primary method for determining boys’ achievement in writing. Currently, Avon Maitland DSB does not have an instrument to formally assess students’ achievement in writing. Therefore, the report card marks served as the main source of data.

- CASI reading attitude survey - We conducted a reading attitude survey, focussed on the following statement: “I am a good reader”. Students responded using a 4-point scale: 1- Disagree; 2- Agree a little; 3- Agree; and 4- Strongly agree.

At first, we found the task of wading through our data overwhelming. Then, we realized we had collected a large body of data that, while important, was not necessarily pertinent to our essential question. For example, CASI is a reading assessment and the data collected from it did not relate specifically to our essential question that focussed on writing achievement. After a great deal of consultation and discussion, we eventually narrowed our data to the sources listed above.

The reading attitude survey seemed the most revealing assessment method, because the results changed significantly from first to third term and came directly from the boys themselves. The overall analysis was conducted by each teacher in his/her classroom.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Reading Attitudes

The graph above displays boys’ responses to the statement, “I am a good reader”, which we believe indicates a positive attitude toward reading. During the first term, 29% of the boys did not agree with this statement. Boys who agreed or strongly agreed constituted 44% of the total. By term 3, only 7% of the boys disagreed and 75% either agreed or strongly agreed that they were good readers. We believe we made significant gains.

Report Card Marks for Writing Achievement
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

The graph on the previous page shows report card marks for boys’ writing achievement for terms 1 and 2 (the conclusion of this study did not coincide with the collection of term 3 data). Report card data indicated a slight improvement in grades over the two terms. Since we had a significant change in reading attitudes, we were hoping to find a positive change in writing achievement. Given our belief that it is easier to change an attitude than an overall mark, we were not surprised that we did not replicate the same level of success for boys’ writing achievement.

In term 1, 40% of boys achieved level 3 or higher. By term 2, 42% of boys had achieved level 3 or higher. However, the graph below shows a finer analysis of the report card grades and the progress made within the four levels of achievement — several boys moved forward. In three cases, students moved back. Again, the degree of change is small, but overall slight gains were made.

Term 2 data for report cards is generally collected in early to mid-February and therefore reflects only half the school year. We anticipate that term 3 data (although not part of this report) will indicate further gains based on the current trends in boys’ writing achievement.

Report Card Marks for Writing Achievement: Finer Analysis
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

Highlights
In the first year of this project, gender differentiated classrooms were fun! We received a lot of positive feedback from the students. They were far less inhibited in discussing their reading and they were enthusiastic about participating in class. Buying books for the library was exciting for the students, and they truly felt they were contributing to the improvement of our school library.

Insights
In the beginning, teachers in our junior division worked cooperatively, yet independently. As this project evolved, the collaboration of the group improved. This past year has been especially productive in terms of setting goals and gathering assessment data. We really like working together! Recently, we have made a great deal of change in our methods of instruction and we are continuing to help each other learn.

New Practices
Our new practices this year included division-wide written re-tells, which we tracked on our new data wall. We focussed on conventions, specifically the use of end punctuation. We have spent time moderating

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
non-fiction books, especially those with large, colourful pictures (e.g.; Tinlids); adventure books; graphic novels;

For professional development:
Literacy for Learning and Me Read? No Way! from the Ministry; The Write Genre by Lori Jamison Rog/Paul Kropp; Better Answers by Ardith Davis Cole; Even Hockey Players Read by David Booth; Reading is Seeing by Jeffrey D.

Team Member Quote:
“This experience really brought our division together. We worked as a professional team and learned from each other. Personally, I really enjoyed teaching an all-girl class, even though it was only for a short period of time, and I would love an opportunity to try it again.”

Administrator Quote:
“While there is not a comparable increase in writing achievement, the overall attitudes of our boys has improved significantly. Although improving attitude is probably a necessary prerequisite, it needs to be accompanied by the appropriate changes in instruction. While the Junior Division teachers have implemented new strategies, I believe the Boys’ Literacy Project has provided them with some valuable insights and will help them further refine their focus and instructional practices.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
book selection; gender differentiated classes; book buying fair; male authors; attitudes toward reading
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Limestone District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
James R. Henderson Public School – SK-Grade 3

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
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Laura Lampropoulos-Morton
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Shelli Campeau
Mandy Blacklock
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Essential Question: What impact will enhanced instructional strategies, data collection, a Professional Learning Community, and appropriate resources have on boys’ reading and writing attitudes and achievement?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Balanced Literacy is key to effective programming. “Having the Right Stuff” and “Teaching with a Purpose” helps tremendously. Our focus this year was on shared reading and the use of the 5-Day Plan. This approach to reading helped our boys become familiar and comfortable with texts and increased their comprehension, involvement, and confidence. The benefits of these strategies transferred to writing for some boys. We have shared our successes using this strategy and we continue to refine our own program.

- It is important that classroom schedules allow for an 80-minute uninterrupted, daily Literacy Block. (Professional Learning Community, Teaching with a Purpose)

- Our focus on boys’ literacy remains constant. To support students, we allowed more tactile responses to texts and centre activities. These strategies promoted and maintained boys’ interest, developed comprehension, and engaged them. (Enhanced Instructional Strategies)

- To support increased tactile responses to reading, we successfully introduced new sharing strategies such as Elbow Partners and Knee-to-Knee for predicting, questioning, visualizing, and making inferences. These strategies provided a non-threatening environment for the boys and benefitted the girls as well. (Enhanced Instructional Strategies)

- It is important to have a balance of non-fiction (informative) and fictional reading materials (shared reading materials and independent leveled books) to meet all the curriculum expectations. (Have the Right Stuff)

- Multilevel groupings is a more inclusive approach and increases readers’ self-image as successful readers. (Enhanced Instructional Strategies)

- Involving students in the development of anchor charts for displaying in the classroom, gives them a sense of ownership and promotes independence. (Enhanced Instructional Strategies)
HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

• We developed a reading strategies checklist. It enabled us to focus our long- and short-term plans and to refine and develop our teaching practices. It was key to grouping children and tracking their progress. (Teaching With a Purpose, Data Collection)

• We purchased 6+1 Traits for all grades and have begun to implement it to address boys' writing skills.

• We developed an instructional resource binder and created a Student Writing Cumulative Scoring Sheet

Student Quote: “I think school is fantastic.” – Grade 2 student in a letter to his pen pal

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These circumstances had a significant impact on our project and our professional growth. For example, through OFIP funding, we visited other classrooms on- and off-sight. We identified and refined teaching strategies and applied them to our own practices (e.g., the 5-Day Plan – Shared Reading Strategy, which has become more effective over the three years). The teacher collaboration and the 5-Day Plan framework had the biggest impact on our boys’ literacy project team.

Although collaboration was very productive, it was also very challenging – time and funding continue to be factors. To address these issues, grade partners shared planning blocks, which were 30-minute blocks for Professional Development during monthly divisional meetings and “Literacy Lunches”.

We have learned that boys enjoy and readily participate in tactile and active responses during literacy block and literacy centres and become more comfortable and confident.

We developed parent and student attitude surveys, which were completed at the beginning and end of each school year. Parents who responded to surveys, conferences, and report cards reported that their sons
WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

Our school has been identified as an OFIP-3 school. Due to the success we have had with the boy’s literacy project, we would like to use OFIP funding to continue professional development, to enhance materials for shared reading (e.g., big books), and to purchase and integrate technological resources (e.g., computer programs, Elmo). We will use data from our reading strategies checklist for future planning. We will continue to involve the parent community through literacy information meetings. We plan to amalgamate the Writing Committee, OFIP, and the Boy’s Literacy Project where boys’ literacy instruction and assessment practices are used. We need to increase collaboration time, visitations, literacy blocks, and shared same-grade planning blocks next year and “Teach with a Purpose”. Through school and classroom funding, we plan to dedicate portions of our funding to “Having the Right Stuff”.

New questions that have emerged from our study include: (1) How can we make the surveys more succinct

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“ I’ve been very impressed with the literacy program in my son’s classroom. My son’s reading and writing has really improved. He loves to write and he is very proud of his work he brings home. It has been a positive, encouraging, and engaging atmosphere for my son. Congratulations to the Closing the Gap Project Team!” –
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Qualitative Data
We revised our Parent and Student Attitude Surveys to include writing as well as reading and administered them at the beginning and end of the school year. The surveys provided us with data about the attitudes of parents and students; how often parents read with their children; parents’ assumptions; students’ preferred genres; and students self-images as readers and writers.

From the surveys, we learned that there was an ongoing need to promote and maintain positive attitudes towards reading and writing. This confirmed the need for us to continue our strategy of providing parents with ongoing information about literacy development and adequate supports to empower them to help their children at home. We learned what resources and what strategies were required to address student and parent needs.

We collected samples of student work, dated them, and put them into a portfolio. We discussed our daily observations with parents and students on a regular basis. Through observations, analyzing student work, and listening to parents’ reflections, we adjusted our teaching strategies to address the needs of our students.

We developed a Reading Strategies Checklist to record and track progress, which enabled us to focus on our long- and short-term plans and to refine and develop our teaching practices. The checklist was key to grouping children for instruction and tracking their progress.

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Results from the DRA were instrumental in our development of a personal reading program and for creating homogenous and heterogenous groups for reading instruction. The Reading Strategy Checklist allowed us to track each child independently, as well as students collectively. We were able to easily identify which strategies needed to be addressed and then to focus on instruction. These were our most revealing and preferred methods.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

The following summarizes and highlights our findings:

Parent Surveys
Parents were asked to complete the surveys from their perspective of their child’s attitudes toward reading and writing. Parent surveys indicate that:
• The number of parents who read daily with their children has increased.
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The DRA for students at Provincial Standard indicates:
• For grade 1, the males performed at 5% in October 2007 and 15% in May 2008.
**FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)**

**Conclusion**  
Overall, our students’ attitudes improved.

The DRA data clearly confirms that reading is developmental and we saw a steady increase across the primary grades in the percentage of boys approaching and performing at the provincial standard.

We believe that “Having the Right Stuff”, implementing the 5-Day Plan, use of the Shared Reading Framework, and use of the Reading Strategy Checklist to “Teach with a Purpose” have improved all our students’ attitudes and abilities.
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Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Toronto District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Kensington Community School — Junior Kindergarten to Grade Six

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Hana Maire — Principal
Sandra Banting — Kindergarten
Adriana Longo — Grades 1/2
Helen Wolfe — Grades 3/4
Rene Martinez — Grades 4/5
Kevin Barrett — Parent

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
Essential Question: If we provide materials that are of interest to boys and that they help select, will this change their behaviours and attitudes toward reading and “school literacy”?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

From our investigations, we learned that we must:

- Meet them where they are;
- Take small steps, aim high, and persist;
- Make literacy a habit;
- Make literacy relevant, “keep it real”, and do not marginalize the boys’ world and interests outside of school;
- Identify and use positive role models;
- Understand that boys are not all the same — they come to us with different interests, strengths, and learning styles;
- Provide the boys with focused, clear, and direct teaching;
- Work together as a school community; and,
- Realize that change takes time.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

We learned that to sustain the boys’ interest and focus we must:

- Start with topics and materials that will engage them;
- Keep lessons active;
- Break skills down into small chunks;
- Keep lessons short and to the point;
- Model;
- Make goals and requirements explicit;
- Give lots of time for practice;
- Provide opportunities to re-teach lessons when necessary; and,
- Let the boys know about their successes.

We also learned that to keep the boys interested and enthusiastic we had to be more flexible and creative when assessing; that is, in addition to writing, allow and encourage the boys to respond orally or with computers, drama, and art.

Student Quote:
“I really like using the computers at school to read, do research, and make presentations. It’s very frustrating when they don’t work or the programs are out of date. The books and magazines (in the school) are better for boys.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Kensington is a small school, so everyone shares the many responsibilities. Since we experienced many changes over the three years of this project in staff and administration, we had to brief new staff very quickly. Very early, we adopted the motto: "Just Do It". We accomplished more by trying things rather than always assembling the entire group to plan. We did much of our planning and updating "on the fly", between classes, over the picnic table, at lunch, via e-mail, as well as through formal meetings. This kept our momentum up as we continuously tried, assessed, and revised in small steps, rather than getting bogged down with huge plans and changes.

Previously, many teachers and parents were disturbed that many boys (even those in JK) did not seem interested in or excited about reading. We began looking at the boys, our practices, and our materials more closely. We received the grant for this project and began our journey. We gathered data about our boys from the boys themselves, and their teachers and parents. We used the data to purchase a rich and varied mix of materials, which we hoped would raise the level of boys' engagement and interest in literacy activities. We involved the boys in choosing the materials from a variety of genres – comic books, graphic novels, fantasy, adventure, magazines, manuals, CDs, CD-ROMS, etc. We met the boys where they were.

Publishers and booksellers brought materials to the school and the boys, with their teachers, examined, discussed and recommended purchases. There was a great deal of enthusiasm. The boys took these decisions very seriously and we all enjoyed the number and quality of the discussions. Parents provided anecdotal information and feedback on their children's interests and involvement in literacy activities. We noticed immediately that the addition of a few non-fiction books into a classroom engaged many boys and increased enthusiasm. Kindergarten boys — who previously waited patiently (or not) for "book time" to end — became engrossed in the new animal, skeleton, dinosaur, and "search and find" books. We were thrilled when they asked to have books or sections of books read to them.

As we made new purchases, excitement grew. We established “Borrow-a-Book” carts on each floor. We set up a section in the library with display shelves for magazines, non-fiction, and contemporary and popular literature. We also included camp chairs, a small sofa, and a carpet in this area. Many boys like to congregate there with their reading materials. The Boys Book Club was also well attended. To keep it fresh, we run it in ten-week cycles. There are always boys on the waiting list. We moved a session "Words in the Playground" outdoors. We eat together, read and discuss current interests, and have a few minutes of exercise. Our literacy activities are more active and hands-on. We plan with boys’ learning styles in mind. In a project about our neighborhood, students were out of the classroom taking photos, interviewing residents, and making movies, paintings, posters, maps, 3-D structures, etc. to demonstrate what they learned. Our exciting journey has started.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

In order to continue to benefit from our work in this project, we will need to keep building on what we've learned and keep up the momentum. We will look for ways to add more “interesting” and easy-to-read books to meet the requests of our youngest readers. We hope to continue adding to and updating the technology our students use.. We will add to our repertoire of required responses and provide many opportunities for the boys to read and write in a hands-on, active, and challenging environment. We plan to continue incorporating literacy materials that reflect the boys’ interests outside of school, and in so doing, help them learn to be critical and thoughtful consumers.

We also hope to establish a computer lab in the Library so that all students can learn to safely, efficiently, and critically “surf the web”. We will continue to work with our parent community to learn what works best for their boys and suggest ways they can support our work at school as we strive to meet our common goals. We will need to examine how we can work more effectively together and build partnerships with all caregivers to support literacy development. In our planning for next year, we want to more actively integrate literacy across the curriculum, perhaps with a focus on science. We will continue to set high standards and teach in small attainable chunks in order to build skills, self-confidence, and self-esteem.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“He has always been different in the ways he developed and learned new skills. We have learned to be patient and then seemingly overnight, “He can do it!” That's how he learned to talk, walk, and now read and write. He's a bright child, active, knows what he likes, and he lets us know what he's thinking. We're so glad that his school and teachers value him for the way he is. He loves nonfiction, comics, and games. These need to be part of his school experience.”

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

At the beginning of our inquiry, we conducted a series of surveys (questionnaires) and interviews, used reading logs and library statistics, and observed the boys’ to collect information about the boys’ literacy habits. All of the children in the school responded to a questionnaire on attitudes and interests before and after the inquiry. We also interviewed the boys, some of their parents, and the teachers about the boys’ interests and literacy habits inside and outside of school. From this data we learned:

- Most boys expressed an interest and enjoyment in reading (in many cases more than we thought).
- Many boys felt they were not good readers and writers. Teachers noted that many boys were not good judges of their own abilities. Poor readers often overstated their abilities and some good readers understated theirs.
- Only a few boys were being read to outside of school on a regular basis.
- Most boys felt that many reading materials at school were not of interest to them and they expressed a desire to have more access to technology at school.
- In class, many boys were not choosing to read, read for only brief periods of time, or were disengaged and easily distracted during reading time.
- Most boys were not reading school materials recreationally or outside the classroom. They read only as much of these materials as was absolutely required.
- One of our youngest readers told us he didn’t want to read because the “easy books” were not interesting.

As we look at our post-project data, we realize we are on our way to achieving our goals: Our data indicates that:

- The boys continue to enjoy literacy activities and reading.
- Many boys have been instructed and now know how to independently choose “just right” books and reading materials from our collections. Through increased time spent reading aloud, partner reading, and coaching, many boys are now better able to self-monitor their reading.
- Although some children are being read to on a regular basis, this still continues to be a challenge we hope to address.
- We have seen a great deal more interest in the materials that are now available to our boys and these are being well used at all times.
- Boys are choosing to read on their own time and the Boys Reading Club is well attended.
- Many parents are now informing us of what seems to be working well for their boys and helping us plan new things to try when literacy activities become a challenge.

Some of the early literacy activities are still called “girl stuff” by reluctant boys.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

At the beginning of the inquiry, we learned that most boys expressed an interest and desire to read, but felt that “school reading” was not really what interested them. The questionnaires showed an interest in these genre: non-fiction, popular, adventure, comic, graphic, and how-to materials. The reading logs and library data showed lots of borrowing, but little daily reading. Classroom observations showed that many boys were restless, disengaged, or easily distracted during independent reading times.

At the end of the inquiry, we readministered the questionnaires, re-examined and tallied reading logs and library statistics, tallied attendance records from the Boys’ Book Club, observed silent reading behaviours, and re-interviewed the boys and some parents. We learned that recreational reading had increased because of the new materials available in classrooms and the library. Reading time in all classes appeared more focused and boys appeared more enthusiastic and engaged. We concluded that this was due to the availability of materials that were more interesting to boys and that the boys had been taught to choose literature that was at their reading level. The younger, beginning readers, were encouraged to read aloud to each other, read charts and information posted around the room, and discuss books during reading time. Reading became much more active and appealing.

Our findings led us to believe that, in order to engage our boys in school literacy activities, we must:

**Have the right stuff:**
We learned that boys are not all the same and their interests and strengths are not the same. Appropriate and varied classroom resources for boys lead to increased interest, engagement, and individual success. Non-fiction, graphic novels, magazines, popular and contemporary materials, and technologies help to develop more interest and a higher level of participation in classrooms. With the new materials, our school Borrow-a-Book program has taken on a new level of energy. We are noticing improvements in reading skills as we observe daily book choices. The grade 1 boys (who were borrowing graphic novels or books about mammals, animals, and action heroes) have begun to request chapter books in grade 2. After reading a book from the *Magic Tree House* series to the class, the teacher noted how it sparked interest in most of the boys. Subsequently, during their monthly visit to our local Public Library, the teacher recorded that several boys borrowed books from the *Magic Tree House* mystery series to take home to read. One boy offered to lend the teacher his book when he was finished reading it, when she indicated she had not yet read it! Some of the less competent readers are beginning to ask classmates to read to them – even in Kindergarten.

**Make literacy a habit:**
We discovered that we needed to designate regular, sometimes short, periods of time for literacy, make it a daily habit, and make it more enjoyable. Our observations indicated that boys often read in “bits and pieces”. We observed that a boy may return to a text many times over months rather than reading it straight through. We learned to watch carefully for “happy accidents” and build on them. It was often by accident that we learned about an interest that would open a door for a child and lead to excitement and enthusiasm for reading or writing. For example, when asked to write about a special gift, one previously reluctant writer was transformed into an almost unstoppable author who began to relate pages of information about his favourite collection. This new energy for writing moved his reading skills along at the same time. Frequent opportunities to read and write for a wide variety of purposes and audiences lead to an increase in boys’ enthusiasm and interest. Levels of participation and skills were also increased when we accepted a range of responses including oral, electronic, and visual, as well as the standard written response, and used these works as objects of critical study and discussion in the classroom.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Understand boys' learning styles and provide them with focused, clear, and direct teaching:
We noticed that self-esteem and self-image played a large role in boys' literacy behaviours. To address this, we began to develop clear, high expectations and teach clearly and directly to these. "What does a good response or good work look like, sound like?" We used modeling, small steps, repetition and practice, coaching, and opportunities to celebrate, display and perform successes to build confidence and self-esteem around "school literacy". The boys and their parents needed to hear about classroom successes often. Personal successes and "how hard you worked" were emphasized. These approaches led to more frequent successes, higher levels of confidence, as well as a greater enthusiasm for literacy activities. Opportunities for a hands-on, more active environment using multiple textual modes drew our boys in. Letting them talk, read aloud and in pairs, present practiced work, use computers to read and write, and providing more opportunities to listen to others reading to them (live and recorded) increased confidence and abilities.

Make literacy relevant and “keep it real”:
When we presented the boys with materials and topics that they perceived as relevant, we noticed increased success and interest. Our use of a wide range of materials (including those from contemporary, popular, and commercial youth cultures) sparked interest and enthusiasm. We are attempting to avoid the marginalization of this part of students’ lives by using contemporary video, audio, games, and popular print media. By bringing their interests into the classroom, we can discuss and address their thoughts, ideas, and impressions and help them develop critical thinking skills about this other world that engages so much of their time and interest.

Build a school-wide focus:
Participation in this inquiry project has led us to more clearly focus our observations and planning, rather than working on too many issues at the same time. We are all working towards a common goal. This year the "Faces and Places of Kensington" project took students, teachers, and literacy outside the classroom. It gave us an opportunity to meet, discuss our aims, and plan how we could reach our goals. It provided opportunities for talk, social interaction, and a chance to bring literacy to life through the arts for the boys. It allowed the boys to incorporate multiple textual modes in their reporting and presentations. It took the school into the community and then brought the community back into the school. The project has been great for the boys because it allowed them to learn, work, and present in small chunks. They have had many opportunities to use real life experiences to encourage reading and writing. The children went into the community with maps and questions they had prepared and written. They interviewed members of the community, took photos, and made notes. They read signs and street names. Back at school, they engaged in multi-modal, multi-textual modes to present their work and findings. Art and technology were integrated into presentations at an Open House for parents, friends, and the community.

Find and use positive role models:
Positive role models influenced and expanded the interests of some boys. At the Boys Book Club, the boys met, listened to, and chatted with older male readers who discussed and shared their interests and experiences. A boys’ lunchtime book club, “The Kit Kat Café” provided an opportunity for boys to come together and experience “literacy” in a more relaxed environment. This has evolved into “Words in the Playground”. Taking literacy outside helped send the implicit message that literacy can be anywhere and that it can be fun. The boys eat, are read to, listen to and engage with visitors, and discuss what they’re currently reading or writing. We have few absences and enthusiasm is high even with the great weather. Within the regular school day we have “Reading Buddies”, which is great peer-teaching and modeling for our younger students. Now the younger buddies are reading books to their bigger partners. Pairing older ESL students with younger ESL buddies allows for first-language conversations. It is generally evident to us, as we observe and record book choices, that the boys have non-fiction books (how-to, technical, animal, dinosaur, cartoon, adventure) and the girls have narrative and fiction books.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before Inquiry</th>
<th>After Inquiry</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiction</td>
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<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Fiction</td>
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<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

The Boys’ Literacy Inquiry Project encouraged and energized us.

We learned to be cautious about our assumptions. We learned to look and then look again when gathering data. Sometimes what seemed obvious at first was not always true. We took time to table our observations and quantitative data and then discuss what all this new information really meant. Did it match our predictions? What else could we learn from the data? Did we see any patterns? How would all of this information inform and direct our teaching practices?

We took more time to consult with each other and with parents and caregivers in our attempts to make sense of how we saw our boys at school.

We were thrilled to be able to purchase so many more interesting and relevant materials for our boys. We began to integrate more technology into our classrooms – for student use and to present lessons in different, more unique, and interesting ways.

As a school, we began to set higher expectations for ourselves and for our students. We began to map out a plan to reach those goals. We found that, if we expected more, taught skills in small chunks, and remained persistent, we often achieved greater success.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Technology
Materials that reflect popular youth culture
Adventure, non-fiction, magazines, how-to books, recipe books

For professional development:
Even Hockey Players Read: Boys, Literacy and Learning by David Booth

Team Member Quote:
“I’ve learned that there are ‘many different paths to the top of the mountain’. We have to be patient and diligent in helping each boy find his path by providing the right materials, good teaching, and tons of encouragement to keep confidence and self-esteem high. The past three years have been an invaluable experience in child watching and problem solving and it has been fun learning together.”

Administrator Quote:
“It is rewarding to see that the boys’ literacy initiative has indeed made a difference to boys and increased their interest in reading and writing. The infusion of non-fiction materials into the school library and the classrooms has helped to ‘hook’ our boys on literacy.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
high expectations; learning styles; technology; non-fiction; self esteem
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Peel District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
King's Masting Public School – Grades JK-5

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
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This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
**Essential Question:** Which strategies (e.g., making connections, questioning, inferring, synthesizing) have the most impact on boys' comprehension of written text?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

Repeated, direct instruction of the reading comprehension strategies as measured by our Reading Strategies Checklist improved boys' reading levels for six of seven strategies. We believe the strategies that had the most impact were:

- determining important ideas (27% improvement over three assessments)
- synthesis (16% improvement), and
- visualizing (14% improvement).

At the conclusion of the third assessment, boys indicated they were most comfortable using visualizing (57%), making connections (50%), and inferring (37%). They also indicated that asking questions (39%), visualizing (36%), and making connections (36%) were best to help them understand what they read. Data confusion and contradiction, however, indicated that synthesizing and inferring are not consistently understood. Inferring showed a decline in achievement level, yet boys indicated that it was the third most popular strategy they were comfortable using. Boys identified both synthesis (43%) and inferring (29%) as the most difficult strategies.

Direct, explicit instruction of the seven reading comprehension strategies improved EQAO reading results by 10%. However, we need to move beyond decoding and comprehension to critical literacy to improve achievement more. Our use of SMART goals created measurable, observable progress in understanding strategies and provided opportunities for collaboration around selection of resources, creation of assessment rubrics, alignment of instructional strategies, and moderation of assessments. Our consistent use of language, instruction, and visual cueing for each strategy across all grades ensured continuity as students moved through the school. New resources that targeted shared, guided, and independent reading assisted us in supporting more effective reading instruction. The acquisition of more non-fiction resources and texts of interest to boys motivated boys to expand their reading skills.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

**Instructional Practices**

We explored many instructional strategies. Close collaboration among staff, including our Early Literacy and Resource Teachers, provided effective learning opportunities for staff and students. The following strategies/tools had the greatest impact on our instruction of reading:

- graphic organizers (e.g., mind maps, placemats, GO charts, and Q charts);
- sticky notes as "think" marks; highlighting text; visual cues (e.g., think aloud bubble, question mark sticks, making connections popsicle sticks, most important idea glove, and retelling glove);
- kinesthetic based activities (e.g., role play and Reader's Theatre);
- graphic novels and non-fiction texts;
- sketch to stretch; think/pair share; wait time for oral responses; increased dialogue around text; pre-teaching of vocabulary; choice of appropriate independent reading material ("just right" books); leveled independent reading bins; linking the home reading program through reading strategy question prompts connected to current classroom focus; and planned, explicit, and direct teaching of reading.

**Assessment Practices**

We have determined that we need to align our assessment practices across the grades. Through close collaboration, we have explored a variety of assessment strategies such as: Alpha Kids, Reaching Readers, and our Reading Strategies Checklist. Assessments "for" and "of" learning were also applied with reading as the specific focus.

**Student Quote:**

"The sticky notes help because sometimes you want to discuss something with your group and you forget, but with the sticky notes you don't. Plus it's much better and more fun than doing book reports."
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

In spring of 2005, our goal was to: “increase by 10% the number of students meeting or exceeding the provincial standard in reading by June 2008.” Based on our EQAO data, we felt we needed to concentrate on reading comprehension strategies and we built a plan for direct instruction to ensure consistency within grades and across the school. For this inquiry project, we refined our goal to: “examine which of the strategies were most effective in the development of boys’ reading skills.”

First, we focused on developing a common understanding of the reading strategies and a common language. We organized a presentation by Donna Baker based on the book *Strategies That Work* and held ongoing large- and small-group follow-ups with the support of our Early Literacy and Resource Teachers. We explored and purchased resources for students to assist us in focusing on strategies for shared, guided, and independent reading. We purchased special resources targeting junior level students who were reading at the primary level. We also decided to consult about our collection and analysis of data.

In Year Two, we were assisted by a Research Consultant who had spent the summer familiarizing herself with the reading strategies and our goals. For purposes of comparison, we included both boys and girls in our project. We also made comparisons across divisions. We used our Reading Strategies Checklist twice — once in the fall and once in the spring — with half of the student population as we continued direct, focused instruction of all strategies for the entire school population. After completion and analysis of the initial Checklist data, we decided to deepen our understanding around the strategy “determining important ideas”. Divisional SMART goals were determined to refine and enhance our reading instruction.

Each year, we celebrated our school-wide reading focus during a January Focus on Reading month with a Family Literacy Evening Presentation. This celebration included sharing strategies with parents, guest readers, author visits, and the launch of our Silver Birch and Blue Spruce reading programs.

The completion and analysis of the second Checklist data helped us set the direction for the final year of our study. We developed new SMART goals and additional ways to collect qualitative data. We continued ongoing modeling of effective strategies and continued to share successes and challenges at staff meetings. As we reach the conclusion of our project, we are celebrating that we have met our original SMART goal. We need to refine and embed our successful practices. Although the work has been intense, the collaboration that has grown from this experience will benefit us as we move forward. Teacher moderation and sharing of effective assessment practices are areas for further growth as we continue our journey.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

- We will further align our assessment strategies within and across grades.
- We will continue to explicitly teach all reading comprehension strategies using common language throughout the grades.
- We will continue to analyze other data from the Checklist and anecdotal notes to target instruction of strategies that are not being seen as effective to readers. We will explore the contradiction in data between synthesizing and inferring.
- We will move beyond the direct instruction of decoding and reading comprehension to the exploration of critical literacy at each grade level through oral and written responses to text.
- We will continue to use SMART goals and teacher moderation to ensure consistency within and across grades.
- We will begin to consistently involve students in deeper analyses of strengths and areas for growth required to be more successful independent readers.
- We will continue to use and revise the curriculum maps for each grade level (this entails reading comprehension strategies and text form teaching connected to Science/Social Studies units) and include assessment plans in the maps.
- We will continue to explore effective uses of the resources we purchased as a result of this study and expand our acquisition of effective resources to deepen the understanding and application of the lessons we learned in this study.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“There are some boys who continue to struggle with decoding skills. However, I believe the reading program has helped them stay engaged in the reading process. Despite their difficulties, they are working hard and enjoy much of what they read. Another boy who struggles with comprehension has begun to make more sense of stories as individual words and their meanings are discussed.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

In collaboration with our Evaluation and Research Consultant, a small group of staff members created A Reading Strategies Checklist. It was designed primarily to provide quantitative data related to the following seven reading strategies:

- making connections;
- asking questions;
- visualizing;
- inferring;
- determining important ideas;
- synthesis, and
- self-monitoring.

We also used the Checklist to collect readers’ perceptions about which reading strategies (1) they felt most comfortable using, (2) best helped them understand the text, and (3) they found most difficult to use. Each reading strategy included a rubric (Levels 1 to 4) for teachers to check how well students used the strategy. Teachers checked whether students used the strategies independently or whether teachers prompted the students. If students did not use the strategy, teachers indicated why it was not used. Due to different maturity levels, teacher prompts for primary and junior students differed slightly. This data was collected three times during the study – fall 2006, spring 2007, and spring 2008. A total of 68 students (JK-grade 5) participated in all three data collections (35 boys and 33 girls).

We collected qualitative data using student reading logs (response journals), observational notes of reading conferences, and anecdotal notes of comments shared during lessons or overheard during group discussions. Highlights of this qualitative data were shared with all staff through an "ah-ha" chart and through sharing of successes/challenges at staff meetings.

The reading strategy that showed the greatest growth was “determining important ideas”. The first year, 54% of the males (and 64% of the females) reported that they did not use or scored Levels 1 or 2 on the rubric for this strategy. Because of these results, we employed the following strategies to raise effectiveness and understanding of this reading strategy:

- Staff created SMART goals by division to address the greatest area of need based on data found in the first Checklist.
- The Resource Teacher created a professional development presentation for staff that focused exclusively on more strategies to deepen understanding of “determining important ideas”.
- Primary staff looked at EQAO key words to determine the most important idea of a question and provided focused instruction around what the question was asking.

The second completion of the Checklist indicated an increase in scores for males for “did not use or scored Levels 1 and 2” to 65% (the females showed a decrease to 42%). This strategy, “determining important ideas” continued to require additional focused instruction and understanding. Therefore, in Year Three of the study, staff created another SMART goal by grade pairs (K-1, 2-3, and 4-5) to address the greatest area of need according to the data found in the second completion of the Checklist and “determining important ideas” was the focus for two of the three groups.

The strategy, “determining important ideas” was taught again, but with a renewed focus. The primary teachers found that tools such as the “most important idea glove” and simple graphic organizers that outlined the most important idea with a few supporting details were very successful. Other tools and/or strategies we found had a positive impact on students when determining important ideas were: (1) the use of highlighters, (2) the ‘sketch to stretch’ activity, (3) simple mind maps, (4) the use of sticky notes, and (5) “think, pair, share” to validate and practice oral responses. Through consultation with the Teacher-Librarian, Early Literacy Teacher, and/or Resource Teacher, we found additional resources to support effective teaching of this strategy. Some primary teachers also focused on the features and conventions of non-fiction text with an emphasis on the author’s purpose in relation to determining important ideas.

Collaboratively, we created a rubric for the final assessment related to this strategy and teacher moderation ensured consistent assessment. Repeated direct instruction of this strategy proved to be a success story for the majority of students.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

The following charts show data for the three strategies that had the most impact on boys’ comprehension of written text based on data collected with the Reading Strategies Checklist in November 2006, May 2007, and April 2008.

Determining Importance
By Gender

Observations For "Determining Important Ideas"
- Repeated instruction has ensured that all students now use the strategy.
- Boys improved significantly in their ability to “determine important ideas”, although there was a dip in the percentage of males performing at Levels 3 and 4 in May 2007 (35%).
- According to qualitative data, however, males ranked this strategy as one of the three least effective for helping them understand what they read (see next page).

Synthesizing
By Gender

Observations For “Synthesizing”
- There was 4% and 12% more boys achieving at Levels 3 and 4 respectively last year.
- There was 19% more girls achieving at Level 3, but 5% fewer achieving at Level 4 last year.
- Males rank this strategy as one of the least helpful (see next page).
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Visualizing By Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Students</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 4</th>
<th>No Pictures / Did Not Use</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Females</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Males</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations for “Visualizing”

- There was a steady increase in the percentages of male and female students achieving at Level 3 (males: 26%, 40%, and 53%; females: 27%, 50%, and 57%).
- There was a steady increase in the percentages of male and female students who reported being comfortable using “visualizing” as a reading strategy (males: 39%, 50%, and 57%; females: 52%, 60% and 72%).
- Compared with 2006 and 2007, in 2008, a smaller percentage of male students reported that “visualizing” was a difficult strategy (22%, 27%, and 7%).

Reading Strategies That Help Students Understand What they Read

By Male Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Students</th>
<th>Making Connections</th>
<th>Asking Questions</th>
<th>Visualizing</th>
<th>Inferring</th>
<th>Determining Importance</th>
<th>Synthesizing Information</th>
<th>Self-Monitoring</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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| **Observations For Males’ Opinions About What Helps Them Understand What They Read**
- “Asking questions”, “making connections”, and “visualizing” are the three strategies most identified by males as helpful in April 2008 for helping them understand what they read.
- Although instructional emphasis was placed on “determining important ideas”, males still rank it as one of the least helpful strategies.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

- Participation in this study has led us to conclude that the teaching of reading comprehension strategies must be sustained and expanded to include the development of skills in the area of critical literacy.

- Boys prefer oral responses to text over written responses; therefore, oral conversations around text improved boys’ comprehension and provided more opportunities for their involvement in the reading process.

- Our professional dialogue about reading instruction, lessons modeled by the Early Literacy Teacher, and our sharing of strategies at staff meetings increased our capacity to deliver a more effective reading instruction program.

- The SMART goal process deepened our understanding and our alignment of instruction, helped us create effective assessment rubrics, led to teacher moderation of assessments, and ultimately improved student achievement.

- We found ways to apply the work of this study to other action research required for AQ courses and determined that direct instruction of these reading strategies transferred to improving French reading comprehension skills. Other teachers noted that students were transferring the language of the reading comprehension strategies to other curriculum areas (e.g., music).

- Staff increased their understandings of which resources provide the necessary links to support the direct instruction of the reading comprehension strategies and which resources motivate boys to participate actively in the reading process. Therefore, we continue to seek out and purchase additional resources for the school library, book room, and classrooms that are reflective of the interests of boys and that have direct links to the instruction of these strategies.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- POWER magazine reading kits for grades 4 and 5
- A plethora of informational texts at various levels which pertain to a variety of subject areas
- A variety of graphic novels such as the Bone series, Calvin and Hobbs, Phonics Comics
- Magazines such as Sports Illustrated for Kids, Hockey, BMX
- RazzKids Web site

For professional growth and understanding of reading instruction:
- Strategies that Work by Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis
- Starting with Comprehension Reading Strategies for the Youngest Learners by Andie Cunningham and Ruth Shagoury
- Beyond Monet: The Artful Science of Instructional Integration by Barrie Bennett and Carol Rolheiser
- Reading Strategy Posters developed by Donna Baker, a teacher in Peel DSB

Team Member Quotes:
"The most important highlights for me of the boys’ literacy inquiry are: (1) children are highly motivated, are relating books to each other, and are making connections and having a deeper understanding; (2) hearing the students talk about what they are thinking as they are reading (or after) — some of them are very insightful and it's surprising and eye-opening!"

Administrator Quote:
"Across the school, we are seeing the "Power of Talk": talk between students about the texts they are reading, talk between students and teachers around the reading strategies they are using, talk between teachers around effective, successful reading instruction, and talk using a consistent language that we are a school community that is all about getting better as readers."

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
reading; reading comprehension; effective reading strategies; reading instruction; reading instruction for boys

teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Upper Canada District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Laggan Public School

Our focus throughout this project was to follow a group of boys beginning in grade 1 through to the end of grade 3. We also worked with a small group of reluctant readers in grade 4 and followed them through to the end of grade 5.

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Carolyn Harrison – team leader and grade 6 teacher
Shona Fraser – grade 3 teacher
Kathleen MacEwen - Principal
Essential Question:
If we can change boys’ attitudes about reading, provide role models, and give them the opportunity to talk about what they read, can we improve their reading scores?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

We have learned that the kind of text boys are asked to read and the kind of classroom activities the boys are engaged in does matter. The boys we followed were drawn to and enjoyed non-fiction books, particularly as early readers. They enjoyed reading fact-books about animals and other science topics. This continued through the three years, but as their skills improved, the kinds of text that interested them expanded. The boys continued to be selective, but they also began to choose other genres. We found that our boys began to enjoy fiction material as well, but they most wanted to read mysteries, comics, and graphic novels. They enjoyed books that made them laugh. Books such as Captain Underpants that were silly and involved gross humour were a big hit. They enjoyed graphic novels like the Bone series. They enjoyed the humour of graphic novels, but they also liked the idea of fewer words on a page. The boys we followed were drawn to series novels and would read every book in the series. Adventure series such as Magic Tree House, The Time Warp Trio, and A Series of Unfortunate Events spread through the classroom. The predictability of the plots and adventures the characters found themselves in were a hook for many of our boys. The idea that many of these books were based on true historical events or facts was also of interest to the boys. Within the classroom, the boys enjoyed reading magazine-style texts, such as Boldprint.

The boys enjoyed sharing and talking about what they had read with others. Class book talks were a big hit. They were given the chance to tell others about the books they were reading. Often conversations would continue later about the books shared during book talks. Reading buddies were a much loved weekly event at which boys had the opportunity to read together and to talk about the texts. The boys were most engaged in activities that provided an opportunity to talk. We also feel the positive changes in how the boys viewed reading was influenced by reading mentors we provided. These strategies help boys view reading as a positive experience and see themselves as good readers. We saw reading scores improve.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?
Throughout this project, we spent more time listening to and observing boys in our classrooms. We spent time conferencing with the boys about their likes and dislikes, about how they read, when they read, and the kind of books they enjoy reading. We were continually observing their behavior in class during reading activities. These observations and conferences drove the choices we made in our classrooms, the materials we chose to use and introduce to our students, as well as the kind of reading activities we used with our students. We incorporated more reading response activities that allowed boys to read with boys and talk about what they were reading. We provided mentor opportunities with older boys and father figures.

We used PM Benchmarks to evaluate the progress of the boys’ oral reading skills and report card marks that reflected overall reading skills. We used parent and student surveys to assess the boys’ attitudes. Our own notes and observations provided information about any changes in the boys’ attitudes towards reading and their reading skills. In addition, the personal feedback that we gathered from our students was an important part of overall reading assessment and provided us with valuable information about the reading lives of our students. Student conferences and student journals helped us determine the next steps in our instructional programs. These lessons will continue to impact our teaching.

Student Quote:
About reading buddies: “We read different stories and learn new facts and pass school time by having a fun activity to learn. We get to read with someone else, instead of reading alone, and we get to discuss about the book.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Our motivation for applying to be part of this inquiry project was simple at first. It was an opportunity to receive funds to buy materials. We needed resources badly and we knew as teachers that getting enticing materials into the hands of our boys would make a difference. When we sat down as a team and began talking about our boys and their reading, we realized that there was more we wanted and could do for them. We looked beyond resources and started to examine their attitudes towards reading. Our school draws from a lower socio-economic area. Fathers are typically uninvolved in the reading activities of their children. The boys’ attitudes reflect this, as most do not see reading as an important or male activity. However, we knew there was a strong link between their dislike of reading and poor reading performances. These understandings grew into our essential question: If we can change boys’ attitudes about reading, provide role models, and give them the opportunity to talk about what they read, can we improve their reading scores?

In the first year, we realized that our study was too large and we needed to focus on a smaller group of boys. Therefore, we decided to track a group of boys from the end of grade 1 through the end of grade 3.

We used surveys and interviews to determine what boys wanted to read, what activities they preferred, and how they viewed themselves as readers. We also involved parents when gathering data. Armed with this base-line data, we chose three main strategies. First, we provided our boys with the right materials: non-fiction, multiple copies of magazines, graphic novels, and Boldprint. Second, we highlighted the importance of talk. The boys told us they liked to act, to move, to make things, and to talk about what they read. Therefore, we gave them lots of opportunities to respond to books in these ways. We made “purposeful talk” an important ingredient of our literacy activities. Third, we tackled how the boys viewed reading. We wanted to show our boys that reading was a “guy thing” as much as a “girl thing”. Many of our boys told us that their fathers didn’t read or they never saw them reading. We felt that we had to educate both students and their families about the importance of reading and the many different formats that reading encompasses in today’s world. We began planning ways to provide them with positive male role models for reading. We started reading buddies on a weekly basis, we designed activities to involve fathers in their sons’ reading, and we partnered with male high school athletes.

Over the three years of this project, we were determined to see if we could change these boys’ attitudes towards reading and, in turn, improve their reading scores.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

We are anxious to see the results of this year’s EQAO scores. Our focus group of boys has just completed grade 3 and the grade 3 EQAO provincial testing. The reading data we collected at the end of grade 1, when this project began, warned us that every boy could be at risk for falling below the provincial standard for reading on the EQAO assessment when they reached grade 3. We feel that our results will be significantly better than predicted because of the changes we have made in our programming. This fall we plan to carefully examine these EQAO test results.

We plan to continue to apply what we have learned over the last three years. We have already begun to share our findings with our colleagues. We have shared with our teaching partners within our own school and presented at a board conference on boys’ literacy in May. The feedback we have received from our colleagues has been very positive and we hope to expand our resources and strategies to other classrooms in our school. We have already seen the mentoring program spread to other classrooms and we hope to involve more grades next year.

We plan to expand our own research in boys’ literacy into the area of writing; another area of need for boys in our school.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“I noticed that my son is more encouraged to read when his father takes an interest in the book he is reading. He enjoys sharing and talking about the book with him.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Since we were measuring attitudes towards reading, we designed a parent questionnaire to determine how they viewed their children’s interests and habits. We also designed and administered a survey for students to tell us about how they viewed reading. This became our base-line data. We used the same measurement tools (with a few adjustments) to measure changes in attitudes over the next three years.

Our questions were designed to identify changes in:
- the kinds of materials the boys wanted to read;
- how often they read;
- the kinds of activities they preferred (e.g., independent, shared, or read aloud), and
- how they viewed themselves as readers.

Attitude toward reading is very subjective. Therefore, we used reading response journals, reading logs, student conferences, interviews, and teacher observations to supplement our questionnaire data.

Because we wanted to measure the effect of changes in boys' attitudes towards reading on their reading scores, we chose PM Benchmarks as our formal assessment tool. Over the course of the project, we assessed the boys' reading performances using PM Benchmarks at the end of each term.

We met regularly as a team to analyze all our data. We continually looked for improvements in the boys’ reading attitudes as well as their reading skills. We also used the same data to help us make decisions about the kind of strategies and materials we would use next in our classrooms.

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Have we improved the boys’ reading skills by improving their attitudes towards reading and targeting their interests? We feel the answer is “yes”. However, we may never know for sure whether giving boys what they want to read, providing mentors, and letting them talk about what they read, truly improved their reading levels – there are just too many other factors.

We do know with certainty that we started with a group of grade 1 boys who just liked to run and play and who were not interested in books or reading. Of the 10 boys we followed for this inquiry project, none were at the expected level of PM Benchmark16 at the end of grade 1. Further, data from our surveys supported our initial assumption that the boys who disliked reading performed poorly in reading assessments.

Over the next year, we used our data to make informed choices about the strategies and resources we wanted to use to engage our boys in reading activities. The feedback we received clearly showed that boys had become more engaged with the kinds of materials and activities we were providing. They were beginning to choose reading as a preferred activity and they were gaining confidence in themselves as readers.

How did this happen? Our interest surveys showed that the boys in grade 1 had limited exposure to a variety of genres. They were familiar with and enjoyed animal fact books, but we needed to engage their interests more by providing a wider range of genres in our classrooms. Our data indicated that, once disinterested students were introduced to a greater variety of resources, they were more likely to find books that were appealing to them. Our data showed that our first assumption – that choice is important to boys – was correct.

The activities we chose to incorporate into our reading program also received positive feedback from the boys. The research told us that when boys talk through their ideas, their understanding of what they have read improves. Therefore, we began to incorporate reading strategies that focused on talk, such as book talks, drama activities, reader’s theatre, and reading buddies. The boys were highly engaged in these activities. Their reading responses showed improved comprehension when talk was involved.

Given the family backgrounds of our boys, we decided that we needed to provide positive role models for reading in school. We introduced mentoring activities such as weekly reading buddies with grade 6 students and a mentoring program with male high school athletes. We held a “Guys Read” event and invited fathers and grandfathers from our school community to come into the classroom and read with small groups. A special invitation was given to fathers to come and participate in a “Family Literacy Night” at which we discussed the importance of reading at home. These mentoring activities generated positive feedback from both the students and their families.

In the spring of 2008, after three years, we see a remarkable difference in these 10 boys. They have become boys who now clearly express an interest in reading and who view themselves as good readers. Our PM Benchmark data shows that all our boys have made significant progress in improving their reading skills. Three of the 10 boys are reading independently beyond the grade 3 level. Four boys read independently at the grade 3 level and only three boys fall below the expected grade 3 level. These three, who are below the expected level, have made great strides in their PM benchmark scores. In addition, their view of themselves as readers continues to improve and hopefully indicates slower, but continued progress in their reading skills.

To conclude, when we consider all our formal and informal data, we can see a direct link between the improvement in our boys’ reading skills and the positive change in their reading attitudes.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

The most significant thing that we have learned as educators through this inquiry project is to listen to our students. We feel that we achieved better results because our students were engaged in what they were reading. We spent a lot of time listening to what the students were telling us about the books they enjoyed reading and used that information to teach the curriculum and to meet expectations. We had always tried to choose rich and engaging materials to read in our classrooms and that has not changed. What has changed is that we are more conscious of what students are choosing to read. When we listened to our students and used materials and strategies that engaged them, they became successful readers.

We learned that is not enough to just have boy-friendly resources available in the classroom. Boys need to be introduced, often with a hook, to new materials we want them to explore.

The success of our mentoring activities clearly showed us that positive male role models for reading are essential in the school and at home. It is important that we educate the boys’ families as well as the boys.

We feel we now have a better understanding of how to engage our boys in reading. We know that this is an important step in helping them become successful readers.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- **Boldprint** and **Power Reading** from Nelson Publishing (magazine style text)
- **Main Sails Reading** from Nelson Publishing
- **Graphic Sparks** from Stone Arch
- **Junior Graphic Mysteries**
- **Bone, Graphic Novel Series**

For professional development:
- **Me Read? No Way!** — Ontario Ministry of Education
- **Beyond Monet** by Barry Bennett
- **Comprehensive Literacy Resource for Grades 3-6 Teachers** by Miriam P. Trehearne

**Team Member Quote:**
“IT is amazing how much they (the boys) like to talk about the books they have read. I enjoyed the conversations between the students who have read the book and those who wanted to read the book.”

“The most significant thing that we have learned through this inquiry project is to listen to our students.”

**Administrator Quote:**
“This research has benefited all of our students, our teachers, and our school community. It helped to raise awareness of the boys’ literacy issue and provided some practical methods for helping young boys become lifelong readers. Some results surprised us, some were predictable, but all were worthwhile.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
talk; reading attitudes; reading mentors; graphic novels; survey
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Halton District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Lakeshore Public School — Grade 2
Tecumseh Public School — Grade 8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Katie Denomey
Kathryn Nichols
Jeff Schlotter
Valerie Cant

teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
**Essential Question:** How will the influence of various role models affect the reading abilities and attitudes of Grade 2 students?

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**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- We learned that students display more enthusiasm when their own opinion is involved (survey completion).
- We learned more about our students learning styles and interests.
- We use different strategies for making reading and writing more fun and exciting.
- Students love to listen to stories written about them or their interests.
- After listening to older role models read aloud in front of others, students want to share their reading and writing more.
- Students become more confident in their writing when using graphic organizers.

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**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

- This project encouraged us to purchase materials (e.g., RAZ kids and *National Geographic*) to increase boys’ motivation and match their learning styles and interests.
- We now provide daily, ongoing assessments to allow us to direct our instruction and meet individual student needs.
- We now consider multiple intelligences. Instead of telling students what to write about, we consider their interests to motivate them more.

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**Student Quote:**

“My reading buddy was so cool. He had the same interests as me (like hockey) and cool hair.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

This project lasted a period of eight weeks. It involved 30 grade 2 students and 34 grade 8 students. We used a motivation and attitude survey as well as an interest survey to collect data. We met with the grade 8 teacher and discussed what our project would look like. After meeting with him, we created an “All About Me” questionnaire that all students completed. Once the surveys were completed and analyzed, we paired the students according to their interests.

Our first meeting with the buddies took place at Lakeshore P.S. The grade 8 students brought a book that interested them. At this first meeting, which was basically a meet and greet time for both groups of students, the buddies completed a Venn diagram comparing their similarities and differences. They then participated in a question and answer period at which the grade 8 students asked the grade 2 students any question of their choice. The grade 8 students and grade 2 students then read their books of interest to their respective buddies.

Our second meeting was at Tecumseh P.S. Before the meeting, the grade 8 students wrote a story using the grade 2 students as main characters and the grade 2 students wrote letters to their grade 8 buddies using the Writing A-Z organizer. Subsequently, at the meeting, the grade 8 students read their stories to the grade 2 students and the grade 2 students read their letters to the grade 8 students.

Our third meeting was back at Lakeshore P.S. and was used as a celebration time. We had a pizza party and the two groups of students were able to eat lunch together.

Once the meetings were over, the grade 2 students completed the survey again and we compared the results with the survey results collected at the beginning of the project.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

- We will continue to use on-line resources such as RAZ Kids and Writing A-Z to motivate students.
- We will continue the link between grade 2 students and grade 8 students in the community.
- We will share this information with staff to ensure we are all using common language.
- We will begin a new professional book study to assist us in meeting individual student needs.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“This was a great motivator to inspire my son to explore his writing abilities.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

We administered an interest survey and a reading/writing survey (which we created ourselves) to each grade 2 student. The attitude survey included questions such as, “Do you think you are a good reader?”

We used the responses on the surveys to determine what type of books to buy to interest our boys. We also purchased an online reading program that was leveled — this resource had both fiction and non-fiction books.

The students’ responses on the attitude survey improved from the first to the second administration.

In October and April/May, we collected PM Benchmark data to determine whether students’ reading abilities had improved. We displayed the benchmarks on a data wall. For those students who seemed to be making progress mid-point, they completed another benchmark as needed.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Reading — PM Benchmarks (pre- and post-data)
The graphs below show the improvement in the PM Benchmark reading results for our grade 2 students. As indicated, all of our students made great gains, some quite significant. At the end of our inquiry, we had twelve students reading eight or more levels higher than they were in October. The first graph shows the improvements in PM Benchmark levels for Class 1-2 and the second graph shows the improvements for Class 2-1.

Reading/Writing Attitude Survey (pre- and post-data)
In the graphs below, we show some of the results from our reading/writing survey. The results show that the students enjoyed writing much more after our inquiry project.

Do you like writing stories?

March

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May

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FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Many students thought that writing was more fun and many were writing more often in their spare time after the inquiry project. There was a significant positive change in students’ attitudes toward writing in school and many enjoyed writing at school more. It was interesting to find that, although many students in our pre-survey did not think highly of writing, they did think of themselves as good writers. It showed us that our students are confident in their abilities.

Do you think writing is fun?

March

May

Most of our students enjoyed reading at the start of the project and thought it was fun; however, at the end of the project, all grade 2 students enjoyed reading and more were reading in their spare time.

Do you like to read in your spare time?

March

May
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

- We realized that we must all make reading and writing interesting and exciting for our students.
- We need to learn how to teach to individual learning styles and interests.
- We understand that it is important to provide young students with good role models.
- We understand that it is important to drive our instruction with data collection and assessment.
- Resources such as RAZ Kids and using the computer to enjoy colourful non-fiction text motivates students.
- We shared and dialogued with staff about strategies and interventions for at-risk students.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
RAZ Kids
National Geographic books
Non-fiction books

For professional development:
Reading with Meaning by Debbie Miller
Differentiated Literacy Centers

Team Member Quote:
“It was amazing to see how focused our at-risk readers were when they met with their grade 8 buddies.”

Administrator Quote:
“This was a great project for our school and students. All the students were motivated and it encouraged them to read and write. The literacy resources we purchased have been a wonderful addition to our school.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
abilities; attitudes; role models; on-line reading resources; RAZ Kids
Final School Report: 2008
Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Near North District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Land of Lakes Senior Public School — Grades 7 and 8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Anne Shillolo
Davette Nixon
Melissa Ellis Van Kooy
Lisa Paradis
Karen Upper

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
**Essential Question:** By having appropriate reading materials for boys and by providing the boys with a regular opportunity for extended silent reading, can we narrow the gap between boys’ and girls’ literacy skills?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Having data was fantastic and provided many insights. We recommend that standardized reading comprehension testing be done on an annual basis in a grade 7/8 setting.

- Significant reading improvement seemed to be tied to brain development and reading readiness (i.e., terms 2 and 3 of grade 8) as much as to programs, materials, and incentives. At our school, we will use this information to target students for literacy intervention. However, qualified researchers should further explore this finding.

- Gendered classes played a role in boys’ reading success, especially in grade 8. We believe gendered class sizes need to be tied to smaller class sizes for full effectiveness.

- We need to invest more of our budgets into appropriate materials such as sets of high-interest/low vocabulary novels dealing with teen issues. We are amazed by the enthusiasm, interest and motivation generated by these materials.

- The Reading Challenge resulted in measurable improvements for boys and girls and the benefits seemed to carry over from grade 7 to grade 8. We will place a greater emphasis on sustained, daily silent reading time and accompany it with discussions, “making connections”, read-alouds, and book talks.

- Better reading skills resulted in better behaviour for some boys. A small group of boys who improved several levels in their reading also reduced their visits to the office from a steady stream to none. Boys who can benefit most from literacy intervention groups should receive this support.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

**Instructional Practices**

We are convinced the Reading Challenge (i.e., simply the concept of longer periods of silent reading each day and reading for enjoyment in a stress-free environment) should be an essential part of our reading program. We must provide a variety of texts at the correct level to engage students. Our students need to be guided through challenging literature and exposure through read-alouds is important. We now have three response journals: Making Connections, Visualizing, and Character.

We continued the idea of friendly competition; that is, using class bar graphs to chart progress. We integrated the teaching of CASI concepts and themes into responses to personal novels and non-fiction books. We made much more use of group work, Book Clubs, and reading responses (including guided responses, group responses, and personal responses), read-alouds, and book talks.

**Assessment Practices**

A lot of the above instructional strategies resulted in new assessment opportunities. Some teachers began using surveys at the beginning of the year to gauge their students’ reading interests. Our board now requires CASI testing four times a year. We now have much more knowledge about the value of different types of assessments and how to use them as a foundation for a reading program.

**Student Quote:**

“When we first got the “Bully”, “Hacker”, and “Juvie” book sets, I read about one a day. I couldn’t put them down. After reading a lot of those books, I decided to read harder books and now I always have a book on the go.”

“Before, I wouldn’t read during reading blocks because I would only read a page and I didn’t see the point but, once we got longer reading time, I would because I know I would get more reading done.”

“My reading has improved because I don’t usually read at home and there is a lot more time reading at school and there is more of a selection to pick through so it is more fun.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Our study did not build from year to year. Our principal changed, some of the teachers changed, and all of the students changed because we are a grade 7/8 school. And, the gender classes were not continued. In brief, here is what we did.

Year 1
We randomly selected 100 students (nearly one third of the grades 7 and 8 students) to be our study group. We administered Flynt Cooter RIC tests before and after the Reading Challenge (in two classrooms) and generated a great deal of data. We worked together to purchase reading materials. The staff was introduced to the concept of a leveled book room, and we had a large publishers’ display and consultation. The staff room tables were full of examples from many different series suitable for young adolescents struggling with literacy skills. At each table was a sheet for teachers’ comments and recommendations.

Year 2
The Reading Challenge ran in one grade 7 classroom. We collected SRA lab and CASI scores. We launched an after-school tutorial program and included the option to join a Book Club. We did a large amount of work to bar code the new reading materials, obtain shelving, and set up the leveled book room. Midway through the year, the books were available for use in classrooms, literacy support groups, and the after-school program. We also received several days of PD designed to introduce literacy strategies used in the junior division to our intermediate school.

Year 3
Two classes participated in the Reading Challenge. CASI scores were collected. As well, with advice from OISE/UT researcher, we investigated how the former grade 7 students in the project did relative to the other grade 8 students. We were very excited by a number of our findings. First, the students wanted to read! They truly enjoyed the opportunity to read at length every day. We were amazed by the progress made by our grade 8 boys. The Reading Challenge resulted in higher CASI scores. (The successful group included a large proportion of our identified students and our only ESL students.) We were also surprised and pleased by the evidence in Year 3 that those who had done the Reading Challenge the year before in grade 7 achieved higher reading scores than their peers in grade 8. (Again, this successful group also contained a large proportion of our identified students and our only ESL students.) Our new books have been an outstanding success on several fronts. We used leveled book sets that appeal to boys for guided reading and book clubs and this has assisted struggling grade 7 male readers, in particular. However, we were surprised to see the extremely high level of interest and motivation related to the high-interest/low-vocabulary novels dealing with teen issues such as bullying, animals, adventure, and relationships. We realized that teachers require further PD and discussion about the topic of struggling adolescent readers and how to assist them. We also realized the importance of a school team that can meet and conduct PD using our own facilitators; the importance of sharing; and the importance of striving for equity and quality in classrooms.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

We will:
• continue to monitor the progress of our male students;
• continue to raise awareness among staff members about the gender gap;
• continue professional development on literacy concerns, particularly teaching reading and the steps in learning to read;
• attempt to build the gender analysis into future action research projects;
• attempt to expand the Reading Challenge into other classrooms and share our data with colleagues in our school and our board;
• develop meaningful projects combining literature, media, and technology to foster literacy development;
• continue to buy books that students enjoy; and
• be more aware of the purposes for collecting data, the types of data, and timing for data collection to ensure that future studies are planned with this knowledge base.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
In responding to the Reading Challenge, one parent wrote, “[Now, my child] loves to read, she is a bookworm. If she is not on the phone with friends, her nose is in a book. She has brought her Dad and I back into reading.”
**WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?**

**DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:**

---

**Reading More**
- Personal goals, Class bar graphs
- Reading response logs
- 40-50 minutes a day

**Help Make It A Habit:**
- Does a regular opportunity for extended silent reading improve boys’ literacy?

**Successful Reading**
- Board report card data
- Flynt Cooter RIC data
- CASI data
- Richer written responses
- Various responses

**Enjoying Reading**
- Survey of reading interests
- Personal choice of books
- Increased selection of books
- Book clubs
- Focus group interviews

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**Reading More: The Reading Challenge**

Students were asked to set a “secret” personal goal of reading 10 or more pages a day, five days a week, for eight or 10 weeks. On most days, 40 to 50 minutes of uninterrupted silent reading was held in class, in addition to other English programs. A form was signed by both the student and a parent, and handed in. Each year, students were amazed to see that, collectively, they could reach this goal by the halfway point. This happened due to their enthusiasm for stories that motivated them to read and to finish a chapter or a book. As well, the provision of books appropriate for different skill levels allowed students with lower skill levels to keep up with their page tallies. The students enjoyed filling out the class bar graphs, as this was a social time where they compared notes on their progress, discussed and traded books with each other, and made recommendations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Pages read</th>
<th>Avg # Pages By Boys</th>
<th>Avg # Pages By Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1 10 wks</td>
<td>13 000</td>
<td>22426</td>
<td>862 Exceeded goals by 72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2 10 weeks</td>
<td>15 500</td>
<td>23 559</td>
<td>717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3 8 weeks</td>
<td>15 389</td>
<td>26 809</td>
<td>2297 Exceeded goals by 117%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Enjoying Reading: Year 1 Focus Group Interviews, All-Boy Class**

“We remember what we read and it keeps us in the mood. We should keep on with the reading challenge for the rest of the year. Some of us have read two or three more times the amount we read before.”

“We liked it because we could do more and more reading and less work. If we have longer reading times, then it’s quieter and it’s more fun.”

“It gives us momentum. When we lose momentum, we lose focus. We have all read more than usual. You’ll start to get into the book and you’ll want to read more and more.”

“We get into a groove and don’t want to stop reading. We would never read until this started.”
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Enjoying Reading: Year 2 Teacher Consultation

Many boys were reading at grade 2-3 level and had rarely, if ever, finished a novel. The students were asked to use the new high-interest/low vocabulary novels to complete 20 minutes of reading each evening. They found the books so engaging that instead of just reading the assigned chapters they were finishing the books. The teacher then had to provide separate sets of novels, one for the program and one for personal reading. As she said, “They read successfully, willingly, and independently.”

Book Clubs

In Year 2, we launched two after-school Boys Book Clubs involving eight boys. The boys were engaged and enthusiastic about their books and the resulting discussions were wide-ranging and thoughtful. This year, we had more boys express interest and elect to join a book club, so we had 17 boys in four book clubs. We were also fortunate in having an exceptional local hockey player, home from college, lead several of these groups. The book clubs involved read-alouds, silent reading, and lots of discussion time. We are very pleased that the boys (1) joined the after-school program and (2) selected the book club as one of their electives. There was a marked preference for fiction versus non-fiction book clubs. The high interest/low-vocabulary novels were again very popular.

Successful Reading: Report Card Marks

For the grade 7 students, 32.4% of the boys and 41.3% of the girls achieved at Level 4, while 29.3% of the boys and 26 % of the girls achieved at Level 3. Slightly more of the boys (4.8%) received R on the report card than did the girls (3.3%).

For the grade 8 students, the gender gap was wider at Level 4 — 20.9% of the boys and 43.0% of the girls achieved Level 4. However, 43.1% of the boys and 40% of the girls achieved Level 3. For Levels 1 and 2 and for R, there were 36% of the boys and only 17% of the girls.

Year 1 — Flynt-Cooter RIC Test Results

Students were tested at the end of February and in early June. The Reading Challenge ran from March 27 to May 31. The graph below shows the increases made by boys versus girls. Grade 8 boys made a tremendous improvement. The numbers on the x axis refer to reading grade level.

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Year 1 To Year 3 — Attitude Survey Highlights

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Year 1 - 76 boys and 95 girls</th>
<th>Year 3 - 71 boys and 93 girls (36 Gr. 8 boys)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Novels are favourite genre</td>
<td>30% of boys</td>
<td>28% of all boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read at home every night</td>
<td>12% of boys</td>
<td>38% of Gr. 8 boys (47% placed novels 1st or 2nd)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read at home 4-7 days a week</td>
<td>12% of boys</td>
<td>9% of all boys, 13% of Gr. 8 boys,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom read at home</td>
<td>49% of boys</td>
<td>16% of all boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39% of all boys</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- Data indicated differences between the genders in responses given to questions regarding favourite core subject, favourite strands in math, and what they like to read.
- Students’ perceptions of themselves as readers were very high. Only 1% of students reported having significant difficulty in reading.
- The goal of 87% of boys and 96% of girls was to attend a post secondary institution.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Year 1 – Boys’ Classes

The graphs below show the increase in boys’ reading scores “at or above” grade level in a gender class compared with a mixed class. The gender classes were not perceived by teachers as a huge success, especially in grade 8. Yet the grade 8 boys made huge improvements in their reading. For this reason, we believe that their amazing success was tied to reading readiness and brain development rather than the program alone.

Year 3 - Comparing All Grade 8 Students to Grade 8 Students Who Were Former Grade 7 Students

Former grade 7 students were those who did the Reading Challenge for two years. Our results showed that the students who had extended reading times for two consecutive years scored higher than their peers.

Year 3 - Comparing Two Grade 8 Classes Who Did the Year 3 Reading Challenge (8B, 78D) With Two Grade 8 Classes That Did Not Do the Reading Challenge (8A, 7C)
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

We enjoyed increased pedagogical conversations surrounding literacy strategies; there were many positive student/teacher interactions; and we were amazed to see learners demonstrate dramatic improvements with the use of our new resources and daily “reading for enjoyment”. The intermediate students benefited from continued read-alouds (vocabulary, plot, themes, and connections). When struggling students experienced success with reading, their behavior improved. At the beginning of each year, boys felt challenged by their poor reading skills and expressed embarrassment and negativity. As they became more proficient, they had a more positive outlook and were shocked that they could read and actually finish a novel. Several boys confessed to “fake reading” in previous novel study activities over the years.

We have become more aware of our own learning. In a staff of 15, ten of us have been actively involved in this project and/or our new OFIP-funded after-school tutorial program. As well, during the 2007-8 school year, eight teachers are taking AQ courses. This new awareness led six of us to develop a TLLP proposal to study the advantages of using electronic media (blogs) to improve students' writing and reading — it was approved. In the second part of this project, we will be setting up a blog for grades 7, 8 and 9 teachers in our board to discuss issues and share resources pertaining to literacy, numeracy, and transition to high school. Our team of six teachers will also use a blog to learn, discuss, and reflect. We have already done several preliminary activities, and we can see the growth we have made as a professional group in terms of drafting the proposal and contributing to the planning process. (This learning is a direct result of the Boys' Literacy Project).

The OISE/UT Support Booklets sent to us and the PD in Sudbury were invaluable for all aspects of the project, especially for training in data collection. Participating in this study has opened up the whole world of action research to us. We feel that we are members of a dynamic and forward-looking staff, and that we are more open than ever to developing and documenting new literacy strategies for our students.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
New Canada series of novels (high-interest/low vocabulary) by various authors
Media/novel combo stations
Magazines and other non-fiction materials
Use of Smart Ideas organizing software
Kurzweil text-to-voice software for grade-level assigned reading and CASI testing
For professional development: All the Support Booklets and DVDs developed for this project by the OISE/UT researcher.
Time allotment for pedagogical discussion about literacy strategies for skill development
Guiding Readers and Writers by Fountas and Pinnell
Better Answers by Ardith Davis Cole
Creating a Literacy Environment For Boys by Chris Spence

Team Member Quote:
“More books!”
“This project led to many positive student/teacher interactions. Students can now display understanding of reading in various forms of media such as art and music. [We could try] addressing various learning styles as well as integrated learning.”
“I became more confident and up-to-date regarding teaching reading and also doing research based on activities in my

Administrator Quote:
“This project and the resulting program have driven a number of new initiatives in our school. We have an after-school program that delivers primarily language-based material. We have been using CASI scores, graphs, and charts to measure change (primarily improvement) and adjust existing programs. It seems the Boys’ Literacy Project has been a catalyst for many other positive developments in our school.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
Reading Challenge; high-interest/low-vocabulary; reading readiness; developmental; behavior
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Rainbow District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Wembley Public School – Grade 8
Lansdowne Public School – Grades 7 and 8 (participated in 2005-07)
Sudbury Secondary School – Grades 9 and 10

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Melanie Bertrand
Sabrina Briscoe
Linda Goulais
Robert Luopa
Leslie Mantle
Stewart Moggy
Trent Oystrick
Cori Pitre
Tiffany Roberts
Sarah Weigelt
Peter Zloczewski
**Essential Question:** How does the availability of a diverse selection of literature specifically identified as appealing to the interests of boys, and the implementation of specific reading engagement strategies — student conferences, silent reading time, literature circles, and reading response journals — positively address reading attitudes, the amount of time spent reading, and the gender gap on the OSSLT?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

**Have the Right Stuff: Choosing Appropriate Classroom Resources for Boys**
Our boys’ literacy committee found an overwhelming correlation between the availability of a diverse selection of resources (magazines, non-fiction, factoid, novels, etc.) and the willingness and eagerness of boys to engage in reading activities.

**Help Make it a Habit: Providing Frequent Opportunities to Read and Write**
We learned that it is critical to allocate frequent and sustained lengths of time for both independent and collaborative reading. Boys benefit from time spent reading independently as well as from opportunities to read collaboratively with another student or small groups of students. Most beneficially, when boys engaged in high interest independent and collaborative reading, they were more likely to continue reading at home.

**Keep it Real: Making Reading and Writing Relevant to Boys**
We selected reading materials of interest to boys such as: (1) action stories that feature boys as the main characters, and (2) information texts on a variety of topics including sports, history, anatomy, and machinery. In an effort to more fully engage boys in their reading, we also used differentiated instruction in both reading and writing, graphic organizers, reading response journals, and literature circles in all the target classrooms.

**Be in Their Corner: The Role of the Teacher in Boys’ Literacy**
We determined that it is imperative that teachers be involved in reading the materials that the students are reading. For example, when selecting and promoting books for literature circles, it is critical that teachers read the materials.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**
Our inquiry project had a profound impact on our instructional and assessment practices. In our boys’ literacy team, we discussed a number of instructional and assessment practices and decided which ones we would employ in our classrooms.

We all incorporated strategies for differentiated instruction. Our main focus was the implementation of literature circles. This is an extremely effective strategy because it allows students to self-select books that are both interesting to them and are at their reading levels. Literature circles also allow students to take some ownership for their learning. The groups determined the reading calendar and the completion of the weekly tasks. Simultaneously, we were able to target specific strategies through mini-lessons as well as dialogue and conferences with both individuals and small groups of students.

We modified our assessment practices over time to reflect a scaffolding approach to skill development. We also modeled reading and writing to ensure that all students were able to respond in writing to the assigned tasks. Student writing was consistently evaluated through the use of rubrics, which we developed specifically for the writing tasks.

**Student Quote:**
“I don’t usually like to read novels because they are boring and too long to read. I didn’t mind reading the novel Sketches for the literature circles. It was really neat that the whole class didn’t have to read the same book. There were different groups and each read a different novel. It sounds like they were pretty good and I might read one of the other literature circle books.”

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Our group was interested in measuring how “having the right stuff” for boys, along with frequent opportunities to read and to talk about their reading, might impact boys’ attitudes to reading. We hoped to show, over two years, that improving boys’ attitudes to reading and their reading habits leads to improved attendance, academic success, and greater success on the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT).

We chose three schools (two elementary and one secondary, in the same family of schools) for this project. Selection criteria included OSSLT results by gender, academic achievement, and attendance. A total of 98 students were involved, 78 students in two grade 8 classes, and 20 students in one grade 9 class. Of these 98 students, 50 were boys.

To learn more about students’ individual reading attitudes and establish starting points from which to measure change, we conducted student conferences and surveys at the beginning and end of the first two years. Teachers met with each of their students individually and students were asked to respond to questions designed to determine their reading interests, attitudes, and habits. Students were asked, for instance, to rate how much they enjoyed reading, how important they felt reading was, how good a reader they considered themselves to be, how much time they spent reading, and to rate the quality and quantity of reading material available in their classroom. Based on this student input in Year One, we upgraded classroom libraries with new fiction and non-fiction books and magazines. A substantial investment, approximately $5,000 per classroom, was spent on the acquisition of new, strategically-chosen reading materials. Book collections were designed to appeal to adolescent students and to boys in particular, and to cover a wide range of interests, reading levels, and subject areas. Preference was given to non-fiction.

We scheduled twenty minutes each day for regular silent reading. The silent reading sessions were student-directed with student-chosen texts. All students participated in regular reading response journals, for which teachers wrote regular responses. We established and maintained a strong collaborative network between elementary and secondary teachers throughout the first year of the project. Our team engaged in a collective analysis of data and identified trends, strengths, and challenges. We formed a professional reading group and a professional literature circle as a training activity. School board literacy and media consultants attended group sessions to inform our teaching practices. We shared project log reflections on a regular basis.

In Years Two and Three, our focus was on literature circles and how these impacted boys’ reading habits.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

We expanded literature circles into a cross-panel literature circle study group and we have a cross-panel, cross-discipline literature circle professional reading group which meets after school. This initiative will continue for the 2008-09 school year.

One intermediate member of our team participated in marking the 2007-08 OSSLT to better understand the test and provide more effective instruction. She will share this knowledge across panels. In 2008-09, she will move to the junior division and will share her expertise in preparation for the Grade 6 EQAO assessment.

Another member of the team, now an administrator, models the literature circle process during professional development opportunities with her staff. Modeling of effective strategies by an administrator provides opportunities for all subject teachers to see what and how to implement these high yield strategies in their own classrooms.

We have acquired and shared alternative resources (e.g., books on tape, scanned texts for use with Kurzweil, and e-texts) to better address the needs of all learners. We will share our resource list with other schools. Many of the resources on this list are available in alternative formats to address the needs of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“I was pleasantly surprised that my son took such an interest in the novel Sketches. He was actually talking about it with us during dinner on a few occasions and he rarely had to be reminded to complete his literature circle assignments. It’s been a real treat to see him actually enjoying reading!”

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education

teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Our team found that “reading-rich classrooms” have a dramatic impact on boys’ attitudes towards reading. Our data indicated that our “reading-rich classrooms” effected a:

- 49% increase in the number of boys who believe there are interesting things to read at school;
- 25% increase in the number of boys reading one to four hours a week;
- 9% increase in the number of boys who believe that reading is enjoyable; and
- 4% increase in the number of boys who believe that reading is important.

As well, our project:
- eliminated the gender gap as measured by the OSSLT;
- developed more successful and engaged readers in silent reading time;
- improved students’ reading response journal entries (better and more meaningful writing); and
- increased students’ sense of pride of ownership of the class library.

Charting Growth: “Reading Is Important”

Figure 1 illustrates that at the conclusion of the first year, the boys in the project (50 boys in grades 8 and 9 in three different schools) were more likely to think of reading as an important activity.

Students responded to the statement Reading is Important with the following scale:
1 = strongly disagree  2 = disagree  3 = disagree somewhat  4 = agree somewhat  5 = agree  6 = strongly agree

March 2006 – 92%
As Figure 1 indicates, in March 2006, 92% of boys felt reading had some importance (a combination of columns 4, 5, and 6).

June 2006 – 97%
When asked the same question in June 2006, 97% of boys felt reading had some importance, an increase of 5%.
DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Charting Growth: “I Enjoy Reading”

Figure 2 demonstrates that boys’ enjoyment of reading increased significantly over the course of the first year. Students responded to the statement I Enjoy Reading with the following scale:
1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = disagree somewhat 4 = agree somewhat 5 = agree 6 = strongly agree

March 2006 – 63%
In March 2006, 63% of boys said they enjoyed reading (the last three columns of the first graph in Figure 2).

June 2006 – 72%
In June 2006, 72% of boys said they enjoyed reading, an overall increase of 9% (the last three columns of the second graph in Figure 2).

Also significant is that the percentage of boys who did not like reading at all (the first two columns of each graph) decreased from 18% to 9%, a reduction of 50%.

After Year One, half as many boys said they did not enjoy reading, which represents a significant change in attitudes toward reading.
Finding: What Does Our Data Show? (cont.)

Charting Growth: Eliminating the Gender Gap for the OSSLT
Our team was most impressed with the gains that first time eligible students made on the OSSLT. We effectively eliminated the gender gap. We expect that for the March 2008 administration of the OSSLT, there will be no gender gap.

Eliminating the Gender Gap

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Gap</th>
<th>First Time Male Successful</th>
<th>First Time Female Successful</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>100%</td>
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OSSLT Administration Date


This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

- Teachers discussed the importance of effective reading resources and a reading-rich classroom environment:

  “The experience showed me that it’s all about having the right stuff. If there are things to read that interest the boys, then they will read. I think that’s the most important thing.”

- We discussed the importance of student conferences to determine what kinds of materials to put in libraries.

  “You can’t inspire a boy to read unless you know what he likes. You have to get to know the boy first. That’s essential. So you talk with them about reading, and then you find the right books. When students have a voice about the kinds of reading materials in their classrooms they are empowered.”

- Teachers also shared the importance of teacher responses to students’ reading journals.

  “The best parts about the reading response journals were that, the more I commented and responded to them, the more interested the boys were about finding interesting things to write to me about. Students wrote a lot of personal opinions and stories as well. It became a game because when they were silent reading and I’d ask them about their book, they would tell me that I’d have to wait to Friday (when they handed in their journals) to find out.”

- Teachers agreed our project had been highly successful.

  “I believe our experiment was very valuable as it reinforced what we felt to be true: that all students can be successful readers if provided suitable (i.e., relevant, inspiring, entertaining, and provocative) materials in an environment that encourages involvement.”

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys: Top choices (as indicated by the students in our classes)
- Guinness Book of World Records;
- The Boy Who Couldn’t Die;
- Ripley’s Believe It or Not!;
- A Child Called It;
- Dear Jo; and Go Ask Alice

For professional development:
- Mini-Lessons for Literature Circles by Harvey Daniels and Nancy Steineke
- Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs & Reading Groups by Harvey Daniels

Team Member Quote:
“My students have been excited to read. The first day I had all the new materials, the students raced into the classroom, grabbed books, sat down, and read. Needless to say, our lesson for the day was postponed. That was a moment that I will never forget.”

Administrator Quote:
“This project provided a wonderful opportunity for a group of teachers to get together around a common concern and to work towards a common goal. There was a lot of energy in the group, and that kept us all going. I believe each one of us learned more about our students and our own teaching practices through this experience. “

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
literature circles; engaging resources; collaborative reading; resource lists; gender gap
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Upper Canada District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Maynard Public School – Grade 7

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
John Bourne
Crystal May
Mary Beth Reynolds
Shanda Foxton
Rebecca Tym
Janice Deacon

teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
**Essential Question:** Do gender based groups impact student interest in reading specifically at the grade 7 level? If materials are provided that match student interests, can we rescue disengaged readers? Does interest in material correlate with quality of written work?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

We learned many things over the three years that we have been running this program. First (and most importantly) we found that gender specific classes are highly effective for this age group. Boys (and girls) felt less inhibited and were able to have more effective class discussions. Feedback from both gender groups overwhelmingly stated that they felt more comfortable without the other. In a “mixed” class, boys felt that the focus was always on the girls, and the girls felt that the boys were always disruptive. We also discovered that our concerns about negative backlash from the parents and students were completely unfounded. Not once in three years has a parent or student complained about gender specific grouping.

It also became apparent to us that the resource materials have a significant impact on the learning of the boys. Specifically, they seem to like graphic novels (particularly ones that have plenty of violence), horror novels (e.g., Dracula and Frankenstein), and watching videos related to the subject matter.

We discovered that adapting our teaching styles to accommodate different learning styles had a huge impact on raising interest level and achievement level. Greater emphasis on oral communication and kinaesthetic activity allowed traditionally low achievers to realize their full potential.

Finally, it became apparent as the project evolved that a combination of quantitative and qualitative data was

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

When it was possible, we tried to have male teachers for both of the boy classes and female teachers for the two girl classes. We also tailored our lessons around the learning styles of the students – of the four classes, two were kinesthetic and two were visual. We placed a heavier emphasis on oral assessment and assessment based on presentations other than writing. (Drama was a key element in this.) Finally, explicit teaching made a significant difference in the achievement levels of all the students.
Student Quote:

“It was good to be in a class without the girls. We were able to be ourselves and we didn’t have to read girly stuff. Mr. Bourne made us read comics - and he calls that work!”

WHAT IS OUR STORY?

When the project began in 2005-06, our focus was exclusively on reading, and specifically the goal of increasing the interest level of boys. We arranged the students into two boy classes and two girl classes, with a high achieving group and a low achieving group for each gender (later re-classified as visual learners and kinesthetic learners). We purchased resources keeping these groups in mind. For the “high” achieving boys group, we purchased class sets of “classic” novels; whereas, for the “low” achieving boys, we purchased a variety of graphic novels (predominantly Batman). It should be noted that, during this first year, we did not give much thought to resources for the girls groups.

At the conclusion of the first year, we realized that it was very limiting to attempt to run a language arts program that focused exclusively on reading. As a result, we incorporated writing and media in 2006-07. It also became obvious to us that the “high” achieving boys were just as interested in reading graphic novels as the “low” achieving boys. Therefore, we switched the structure from having two distinct programs with different resources, to having a similar program with identical resources. The style of teaching became the differentiating factor. Collaborative planning became necessary and we gave the girl groups more attention in terms of resource selection.

Data collection for the first two years were essentially qualitative. Student feedback was recorded and anecdotal observations were used as a gauge to measure interest levels. In 2007-08, we decided to use a more quantitative method to determine progress. (See data and results below.) Collaborative planning of material use and activities continued to develop and we used non-fiction materials more extensively. In the final year, we utilized other forms of “text” such as song lyrics, DVD’s, magazines, pictures, drama scripts, and storytelling.

Our focus in 2007-08 became more specific. Emphasis was placed on identifying main idea, describing what
WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

Our current objective is to maintain the gender specific groups for language arts for grade 7. This is contingent on certain logistics -- primarily the availability of two extra teachers to turn two classes into four.

Ideally, we would like to extend the program into grade 8. If it is possible to schedule and secure enough teachers for the initiative, the gender based literacy project can become an intermediate program as opposed to a solely grade 7 program.

With the success of using graphic novels with the boys, we would also like to seek out graphic novel resources that are more appropriate to girls. Although this is not within the context of “boys” literacy, our project has shown us that having gender specific classes makes the initiative a boys AND girls literacy program.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?
DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

We used various methods and devices to gather data for this project. The following were the most significant:

Surveys
We administered a reading survey at the beginning and the end of the program each year. The survey was designed to gauge boys’ interest in reading, what reading materials (if any) they had at home, what type(s) of materials they enjoyed reading, and whether or not they liked to read independently or in groups. Our objective was to determine whether their attitudes and habits regarding reading changed as a result of the project.

EQAO Results
One of the benefits of conducting this inquiry project in grade 7 was that we were able to access boys’ EQAO scores (which they had just written at the end of grade 6) to help us with the process of grouping the students. It was also one of the pieces of hard data that we used to measure their progress over the timeline set out for the program.

Conferencing
We found that conferencing was one of our more effective qualitative methods for gathering data. Conferencing one-on-one with students allowed them the opportunity to present their thoughts and comprehension orally. Students who were traditionally weak in written communication often excelled in the conferencing and other oral communication opportunities.

Regular Assignments
Assignments differed from class to class and were tailor-made for the learning styles of the students. Regardless of what format they took, they focussed on analysis, synthesis, comprehension, and metacognition. We used rubrics and exemplars to give students explicit direction for assessments.

Observations
Much of the qualitative methodology was designed around our professional observations of the classes and comparing the behaviours, attitudes, and achievements of the students when they were in gender specific groups, and when they were in mixed groups. We documented, compared, and analysed our observations during PLC meetings.

CASI
This formed the framework of our quantitative assessment for Year 3 of the project. We identified three questions and used them as the guiding format for all units. A CASI test was administered at the beginning and the end of our gender specific groupings and we compared the test scores to measure growth and achievement. We designed CASI-like questions (or “quasi-CASI” as they became known) to assess the students’ achievement based on the materials we were covering (e.g., graphic novels, song lyrics, and novels).
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Our surveys and observations showed a definite change in attitude about reading. What was apparent at the outset is that boys had a very narrow definition of reading, which was to simply read textbooks and novels for school. When it was pointed out to them over the several months of the project that graphic novels, newspapers, manuals, and song lyrics were also “reading” materials, their outlook brightened. It also became apparent that they were unaware that media literacy was a form of reading as well – a notion that is still lost on many educators as well.

As our qualitative data was indicating a significant change in attitudes toward reading, we decided to switch our focus to more quantitative methodology in order to determine whether or not the program had any effect on their levels of achievement. Within the context of EQAO testing and the OSSLT, we wanted to know if the gender-specific classes and our choice of resources could impact and improve standardized test scores. The device we chose to measure this was the CASI. At the onset of the groupings, we administered a CASI test to all students in grade 7, focussing on three main questions:

- What is the main idea of the article?
- What did you learn from reading the article? Make connections to your own life or current events.
- After highlighting one passage from the text, we would ask: “Circle the descriptive words and phrases from this passage. How does it affect you as a reader?”

This CASI was administered in January of 2008, and results were broken down by question and gender. During the course of our project inquiry (until May), we worked on our respective girls and boys resources, but always discussed and analyzed the three questions outlined above. When we administered the CASI again (with a different article but the same questions) in May, our results were interesting and are depicted in the graphs below.

Graphs
For the first question, “What is the main idea of the article/story?” Graph #1 displays the percentages of students who achieved a Level 3 or 4 in January, and the percentages in May. The graph is split into boys and girls, the first bar (light coloured) indicating the January figures, and the second (dark colour) indicating the May figures. The first set of bars are scores for the boys, the second is for the girls.

This same pattern continues for graphs #2 and #3.

By reading the graphs it is obvious that significant improvement was made for both the girls and boys during the course of this inquiry.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Graph #1

% of Responses at Levels 3 or 4
What is the Main Idea?

Graph #2

% of Responses at Levels 3 or 4
What did you learn?

Graph #3

% of Responses at Levels 3 or 4
How do the descriptive words and phrases effect you?
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

This project has emphasized the benefits of explicit teaching. We have found that explicit instruction is instrumental in student achievement. It has also made us better organized and cooperative when it comes to planning. Our boys' literacy project has given our PLC a focus and the success we have found so far has allowed us to use the same model of planning for other subject areas.

The inquiry project has enabled us to develop a “backwards planning” method, which has had enormous pedagogical benefits. Backwards planning is essentially the process of developing long-range plans, tying those plans to curriculum expectations, and then tailoring your lessons and subject areas to explicitly teach what you have outlined.

The project has also inspired us to seek out literature and other professional reading pertaining to boys' literacy and gender specific classrooms. The insights and philosophies by people working in this context (or advocating for it) have helped shape our direction and goals. Information concerning teaching practices, resources, empirical data, and assessment have been integral in the evolution of our specific project.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Graphic novels (particularly ones dealing with Super heroes), song lyrics, movies, monster novels, adventure novels, the newspaper, and drama scripts.

For professional development:
In Graphic Detail by David Booth and Kathleen Gould Lundy

Team Member Quote:
“The growth shown between the first and second CASI was unbelievable.”

Administrator Quote:
“This has been a very exciting project to track over three years. What I was struck by the most was the willingness of the students participating in gender specific classes to engage in oral discussion. We have been reminded by the LNS of the importance of oral discussion in literacy development. Gender specific grouping provides for much richer discussions. Boys aren’t distracted by the girls and girls are less inhibited

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
gender-specific; graphic novels; media; Batman; boys
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Toronto District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
McKee Public School — Grades 4 and 5

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Flavia Churchill — Special Education Teacher and Team Leader
Nancy Charron — Librarian
Cheryl Patterson — Principal
Hindy Bieler — Vice Principal
**Essential Question:** Literature Circles and Talk: What is the impact on Stage 2 ESL boys’ reading attitudes and abilities?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Talk is important. The Literature Circle approach allowed the boys to share thoughts on what they were reading.
- It is important for boys to share books through oral talk, reading together, reading the same material, and comparing different books read.
- It is important to vary the genres of the books used such as non-fiction, graphic novels, fiction, and magazine s.
- Teachers and students should read together – both aloud and silently.
- Direct teaching/modeling of roles should be used in Literature Circles: teacher acts as a role model and guides and directly teaches the necessary information that boys need in order to improve reading skills and comprehension.
- Boys should be provided with a choice of reading materials.
- Allow boys to help determine the group composition: shared decision making between the teacher and the students.
- Provide sustained periods of time to read and talk in a supportive atmosphere.
- Articulate strategies used when reading and have the boys begin to understand the strategies they are using when reading: rereading for meaning, use of phonetic skills, use of reference materials to help locate a repeated word in text we don’t understand, and use of picture cues.
- Guide the boys in order to help them learn how to independently work in the group and stay on task.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

- We modelled best practices with other staff members (professional development).
- We made strategies explicit and modelled them in literature circles: roles, how to read together, talking, turn sharing, listening, inferencing, and predicting.
- We acted as facilitators and guides and were intricately involved in keeping boys on task and moving forward.
- We allowed the boys ownership of reading materials and their work.
- We focused on formative and summative evaluation of student work.
- Our observations and anecdotal notes guided our instructional practices for next steps.
- We introduced a variety of genres of reading materials as valid forms of text in the classroom and did not rely solely on fictional works and novels.
- We developed a professional and collaborative learning environment in the school, including teacher book clubs, to share information, findings, and resources.
- We used a variety of media and text to support learning — open-ended notebooks for recording information, the Internet to look up information, and reference texts such as dictionaries and thesaurus — and shared this knowledge with each other.

**Student Quote:**

“Yes, it really helped me because I read here and we talk to each other about books and now at home I start to read more.”

“Finally, you can talk out loud. It’s like at the playground, but instead you learn.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

McKee Public School has a population of approximately 650 students and 90% have a first language other than English. Approximately 24% of the students have lived in Canada for two years or less and 22% have lived in Canada for three to five years. Our school hosts the international language program for our area and offers after-school language instruction in Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, and Farsi. Therefore, our initial proposal for this project was driven by the needs of our diverse student population and the number of English language learners.

At the beginning of our project, three years ago, our goal was to begin to use Literature Circles with Stage 2 ESL learners to improve their attitudes towards reading and build on their existing reading skills. As the project approaches the end of the third year, we hope to begin to implement Literature Circles into regular classroom programs for the next school year.

We experienced a variety of changes in staffing including team leaders, administration, and ESL teachers. These changes led to some inconsistencies, but we were able to sustain the project over the three years.

The team leader worked with a new group of boys for both Year 2 and Year 3 because many of the boys in the group were in grades 4 and 5. As the boys transitioned out of Stage 2 ESL and moved onto Middle School or moved out of the school area, new groups were formed each year. The first year was coordinated by the original team leader. During that year, the groundwork was laid and a framework for the following two years was created. Data was collected during Year 1 about boys' reading preferences.

One of the difficulties we encountered in both Years 2 and 3 was in meeting with the groups consistently during our scheduled times. Because we pulled students from different classes and were bound to a timetable geared to the classrooms of the participating teachers, various school events and holidays sometimes forced the cancellation of the Literature Circles. The boys sometimes missed a session due to a special event in the school, a P.A. day, a statutory holiday, or because the classroom teacher had scheduled a test or some other special event. The time lag between sessions sometimes frustrated the boys as well as the lead teachers.

We met with each group once a week, but found that too much time lagged between sessions. Re-establishment of group norms took time because boys were coming together from different classrooms to work together as a new group.

To counteract some of the difficulties we encountered this year, we plan to implement the Literature Circle approach in the regular classroom setting. We have begun to discuss the use of Literature Circles and in-serving teachers on both Literature Circles and the new materials we ordered for boys, which will be shared with the rest of the school. Modeling and team-teaching for the 2008-09 year along with some workshops and in-service for staff by team leaders should help launch the project next year.

The enthusiasm that the boys displayed for the group was infectious. Walking down the hall at transition times or out on the playground, the boys would approach us to ask if the group was on this week or why it had been cancelled the previous week. There was an eagerness to participate and share books. One of the comments that reflect the interest in books was shared recently by one of the boys who initially struggled with the Silver Birch novel *Things are Looking Grimm* by Jill Bar-El. He came bounding in to the group meeting with a huge grin on his face exclaiming “That was the best book I ever read. It was so funny! I can’t wait to talk about it!” What more can we ask for? Enthusiasm, interest and a shared love of books and reading will keep our boys interested and engaged.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“It’s the best. I believe that it is very good that Tommy has more time to read now than he used to in Korea. Difficult for him. Although he is getting better he is still struggling. Since he is in elementary school, he is doing lots of reading. I believe it will benefit him in the future.”

“He reads with sincerity, concentration, and focus and discussed with us after completing the book.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Quantitative Data
The quantitative data we collected related to our essential question. Quantitative data for 2007-08 consisted of report card marks and standardized test scores using Brigance Comprehensive Inventory of Basic Skills. In Year 2, we also included standardized tests of word recognition and oral reading skills. Due to time constraints, we obtained only final year-end scores for word recognition and oral reading for 2007-08.

Because 15 of the boys in the project were working at Stage 2 ESL level or in the Reception Class (Stage 1 ESL), their English language skills were at least two years below grade level when the project was started. A breakdown of the actual grade levels of the boys and the ESL stages is as follows:

Grade 4 boys: 10 boys working at Stage 2 ESL
Grade 5 boys: 4 boys with ESL as a factor in learning but no longer working in the ESL stages
Grade 5 boys: 3 boys working at ESL stage 1
Grade 5 boys: 2 boys working at ESL stage 2

We graphed the year-end results for word recognition skills and oral reading comprehension to show where the boys placed according to grade level. Taking into account the baseline data (it can be assumed that 15 of the boys were working at the grade 1-3 level due to the Stage 2 and Stage 3 reports), we analyzed the results to determine whether the boys were functioning at or approaching grade level.

Although the quantitative data provided some real numbers about reading levels, it is important to remember that our group met only once a week and several other factors could have impacted the results. The regular classroom lessons delivered throughout the year would have had a very large impact on reading ability. Many of the boys also continued to receive some ESL support. The home environment and how often English was used, as well as the fact that some of the boys may have had private tutoring outside of the school setting, would have all contributed to overall improvements in reading skills. Upon reflection, and given more time, it would have been beneficial to send home a year-end parent questionnaire to inquire about home practices and the impact that these might have had on reading ability.

Qualitative Data
The qualitative data we collected consisted of:

- An open-ended written response asking the boys to reflect on the Literature Circle approach. The question, “Tell us about the boys’ reading group. What did you like and what didn’t you like about it?” was posed during the second term and the boys were asked to provide a written response. As the boys were just beginning to develop their writing skills, we allowed them to write in any style they chose (e.g., point form or narrative). Spelling was played down and we encouraged them to share their thoughts and ideas.
- A year-end questionnaire using a rating scale and comments.
- Anecdotal comments recorded by the team leader as the Literature Circle sessions progressed throughout the year.
- Student notebook responses and post-it notes. Because our essential question addresses the impact on reading attitudes and abilities of the boys, the written notebook response data was not analyzed at length.

We analyzed the qualitative data to determine boys’ attitudes towards reading and their participation in the Literature Circle reading group and whether there was an impact on their reading attitudes as well.

We examined the qualitative data for key words, phrases, and strategies the boys found useful or a hindrance to overall reading enjoyment and improved ability. We examined the opened-ended reflections completed in Term 2 for key words and phrases and tabulated them to determine how often these thoughts were reflected in the responses. We also tabulated the sliding scales (1-5) for each response and examined the comment section below each set of rating scales for key words and phrases.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Quantitative Data Findings

- 11 of the boys who participated in this year’s study were graded at Stage 2 ESL on the June 2007 report card.
- 3 of the boys were graded at Stage 1 ESL for the November 2007 report card.
- 4 of the boys had ESL as a factor.
- 1 of the boys had been working at Stage 2 for grade 3, returned to China for grade 4, and then came back to Canada for the 2007-08 school year. He was considered to be working at Stage 2 or 3 ESL at the beginning of the school year.

The following is a breakdown of the “oral reading” skill levels in May 2008 for all the boys in the project:
Grade 3: 5 boys
Grade 4: 3 boys
Grade 5: 4 boys
Grade 6: 3 boys
Grade 7: 4 boys

The following is a breakdown of the “word recognition” skill levels in May 2008 for all the boys in the project:
Grade 4: 1 Boy
Grade 5: 6 Boys
Grade 6: 4 Boys
Grade 7: 3 Boys
Grade 8: 5 Boys

The results from the standardized tests indicated that the boys made gains in the area of oral reading skills and word recognition skills. These were the two areas highlighted during our group sessions. Boys read aloud to each other, listened to the teacher read aloud as they followed in their books, and followed along with each other. We often asked the boys to choose recurring words they found difficult to read and understand and taught them how to use dictionaries and the Internet to find the meanings of these words. We assessed the oral reading comprehension of the passages read by the boys by having them retell what they had read. As mentioned in the previous section, the boys’ literacy group was one of the contributing factors to the improvement in abilities, but the impact of the regular classroom, ESL support, and the home environment must also be taken into consideration.

Qualitative Data Findings

In 2007-08, there were 19 members in our boys’ literacy group. All 19 boys completed an open-ended reflection asking them to talk about the Literature Circle experience during the second term of the project. Then, 18 boys completed a year-end questionnaire to rate reading materials, strategies, and teaching methods, and responded to a series of questions related to the Literature Circle approach.

During the second term, the boys were asked to respond to the question, “What do you like or dislike about the Literature Circle group?” In the resource Me Read? No Way! Daniels states, “A spirit of fun and playfulness is maintained.” (pg. 27).

This attitude about the Literature Circle group is reflected in the comments made by the boys. A breakdown of key phrases, attitudes, or words found in their reflections is listed below:

- 15 boys explicitly stated that they liked the group
- 14 boys stated that they enjoyed talking about books with each other
- 8 boys stated that the group was fun
- 5 boys stated that the group improved their reading
Towards the end of the year, the boys were administered a questionnaire asking them to rate materials and teaching strategies and 15 questionnaires were completed and returned. Key findings using a sliding scale of 1-5 (1 being the least and 5 being the most) are listed below. The numbers in brackets represent the number of boys who provided that response or idea.

The boys preferred to read the following types of books:
- Non-fiction (10)
- Graphic novels (9)
- Fiction (9)
- Information books (9)

The boys found the following strategies helpful:
- Reading together (13)
- Talking/discussing (11)
- Teacher role modeling (11)
- Technology/Internet (10)

The boys found the following materials and resources helpful:
- Teacher/facilitator (13)
- Internet (12)
- Each other/Peer Support (10)
- Other books/texts (9)

Together, our notes, the reading data collected from the boys, and our observations lead to some of the following key findings:
- The boys were engaged and focused on reading.
- For the most part, the boys stayed on task.
- The boys reached a level of success that encouraged them to move forward.
- With support from their teachers and each other, they gained confidence, their reading skills improved, and they more willingly approached texts.
- The boys moved from using graphic novels and non-fiction materials to reading Silver Birch award winning and nominated novels.
- The boys’ perceptions of a book or story can and will change as they read and work together — usually more positive but sometimes they find they don’t enjoy a book and that is okay.
- The boys were able to articulate their interests, why they did or did not like a certain book.
- They began to learn how to formulate a preference and taste for reading materials.
- They could justify their independent choice of reading materials.
- The boys gained confidence in their ability to express themselves using the English language.
- Talking and reading together provided a safe and comfortable environment for the boys.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

The enthusiasm the boys brought with them to each session was contagious. It transferred to our group leaders and our two weekly sessions began to change in teaching format and style as we worked with the boys. By listening to their responses, looking at where their interests lay, when they were engaged and when they began to get off task, we were able to begin to hone in on some of the strategies that really kept them focused and talking about their books. We learned from our observations. We listened to what the boys had to say and observed their behaviours as they read and worked together. It helped us to plan for our next lesson and work with the group to learn together rather than just deliver lessons to the boys.

As the boys asked questions about what they were reading, we taught them how to use alternate texts such as other books, dictionaries, and reference materials. Since we had access to the computer, we also searched the Internet to answer their questions. As time went on, the boys began to automatically use these resources without guidance from us. They began to realize they could rely on each other as well as the teacher as they talked and shared thoughts and ideas about their books.

We learned about perseverance and how to help boys work through the difficult patches when a text was too difficult or boring. We gave them the language they could use to convey how they were feeling about a book by actively listening to them and modeling responses for them. This was especially evident when we introduced the Silver Birch novel sets. As we went on and read together, the boys began to show a keen interest in the stories and what would happen next. At the end of one book, one of the boys enthusiastically announced that it was the best book he had ever read! When he first started to read the text, he was somewhat hesitant and wanted to get back to the graphic novels and magazines he so dearly loved.

Supporting the boys as they read and modeling strategies to use when reading and talking in a group setting are key strategies that contributed to a more positive attitude towards reading. As teachers, we tried to nurture the importance of honestly sharing ideas and allowing time for purposeful talk rather than just reading to answer comprehension questions.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- Boldprint Kids by Thomson Nelson
- Double Takes by Nelson
- Power Magazines by Harcourt Canada

For professional development:
- *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels

**Team Member Quote:**
“The atmosphere that was evident each week during our group sessions was one of a committed group of readers discussing their ideas and reflections about books and their lives.”

**Administrator Quote:**
“I liked hearing the boys’ comments and how much they enjoyed reading. I see this as a foundation for a love of reading for years to come.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
Literature Circles; ESL; talk; reading attitudes; boys
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Upper Grand District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Minto-Clifford Public School – K to Grade 5
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Essential Question: Will the strategic use of graphic organizer writing frames, complemented by daily teacher modelling, explicit skill-based instruction, student practise (within specific time frames) and regular, targeted, and individualized feedback translate into boys' improved writing performance?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

First and foremost, we raised our classroom standards to match the Ontario Language curriculum expectations and the Writing Exemplars. Another welcomed result was that teachers accepted the responsibility for their students becoming better writers. They were involved in lots of professional development, using First Steps in Writing to understand the developmental nature of improving students’ writing skills. The level of professional dialogue improved remarkably and was evident at meetings, in the halls, and in our staff room. Teachers shared resources and lessons that worked well with their students. We were raising the bar, but we were also raising the floor to help all students be as successful as possible. In classrooms, students and teachers were more focused as students benefitted from direct instruction and clear expectations. Blaming failure on students’ gender, behaviour, or home environment was no longer acceptable and teachers accepted their professional responsibility for all students to become successful learners. We made it clear from the start that no one could opt out of the writing task or collaborative assessment and reporting those results to parents at the end of each term. The expectation continues to be that “we are all getting better together”.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

Students and Parents
Prior to report cards each term, students receive a graded sample of their writing so they understand their strengths, weaknesses, and next steps. For accountability, parents sign and return a form which also invites their comments.

Teachers
By marking student work with grade partners, they realize the ever-changing needs of the class and individual students and can plan accordingly.

Student Quote:
“The checric helped me (know) how to get the level I want to get.”
“It is helpful because it reminds me to add what I need...to improve my grades.”
“Yes, the checric helped me because the checric shows how you did in different places, and then you know what...you need to improve. Also at the bottom of the checric the teacher gives you feedback and tells you exactly what you need to improve in certain areas in your writing.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Our Boys’ Literacy project began with developing expertise in our teachers’ abilities to deliver the curriculum using effective instructional strategies and resources and our school’s commitment to establishing an environment among teachers and support staff in which we all are accountable for improving students’ learning. In the process, we learned to function as an effective and collaborative professional learning community to build staff capacity to improve all students’ learning.

Though our project focused on using graphic organizers and technology to improve students’ abilities to organize their thoughts and communicate information clearly and effectively, our school hoped to improve students’ writing across the curriculum and raise our EQAO scores. We were looking for the “biggest bang for the biggest buck”; that is, what could be done to raise the bar and close the achievement gap for all of our students, particularly our boys.

During our action research, we thoroughly analyzed the Ontario Curriculum to ensure we were effectively teaching the expectations. Teachers noted “Bloom’s Taxonomy” with higher-order questioning throughout the document and the alignment and consistency from grade-to-grade. Our school mapped text forms and styles from Kindergarten to Grade 8, using prompts taken directly from the curriculum. This writing continuum ensured that students were well prepared for the Primary and Junior Years Assessment (EQAO).

Our school developed writing “checrics” for assessment of student work and used feedback from teachers to refine and improve them during the three years of research. This provided quantitative “hard” data for us to analyze and our survey of attitudes and beliefs provided qualitative “soft” data for our reflection. We did collaborative marking and the “egg-carton school walls” began to crumble. For the first time, all teachers were regularly sharing their students’ work with their grade team partners and, in the process, formed a clear

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

We will:

• continue term by term Writing Task (providing feedback to students and parents);
• continue to compare and analyze data (Writing Task data, report card writing marks, and EQAO results);
• update “checrics” to match new Language curriculum;
• provide explicit instruction of writing traits and map them in students’ long range plans; and
• develop an Exemplar Binder: organize school-wide exemplars that are easily accessible to all staff to ensure consistent expectations (delivery of instruction and assessment and completion of “checrics” including constructive Next Steps).

Parent/Guardian Quote:
In response to the first time we sent home a writing sample along with the “checric” with specific understandable feedback about the strengths, weaknesses, and next steps in children’s writing....

“It’s about time! Because I want to see what my children are doing.” – Jacquelyn Scholten (parent of 3 students in our school)
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?
DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

M.C.P.S. School-Wide Writing Assessment
This chart compares our school-wide writing data from just the first terms of the 2006-07 and 2007-08 school years.

The analysis of this data helped us to set school-wide, grade level, and classroom instructional goals. For example, our students’ Reasoning and Communication scores appeared weak. Due to the importance of these categories in the curriculum, we focused our instruction on improving these areas and chose not to assess conventions on our first term writing task in 2007-08. We directed students’ attention towards improving word choice and creating a strong voice and this helped to create engaged writers focused on quality and not simply proper spelling. The analysis of this data allowed our principal and us to set high, but achievable school goals and raise classroom academic standards.
**FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?**

Improved EQAO Writing Scores of Boys and Girls  
Percentage of Students At or Above Provincial Standards - EQAO

This graph indicates improved EQAO writing scores over the three years of our study. We’ve raised the floor and raised the bar for both boys and girls. However, there has been a minimal closing of the gap between boys and girls.

Due to the focus on writing, our reading scores increased as well, proving the inseparable link between reading and writing.

Improved EQAO Writing and Reading Scores  
Percentage of Students At or Above Provincial Standards - EQAO

Over the three years of our study, our report card marks more closely reflected EQAO scores.

Closer Alignment of Report Card Marks with EQAO Scores  
Percentage of Students At or Above Provincial Standards

**teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca**  
This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Making the reading-writing connection has empowered our teachers, changed classroom practices, and enabled our students to demonstrate an improved skill-set in their writing across the curriculum.

Academic Press
We learned that using data to set targets; implementing focused, direct, and explicit instruction; and using graphic organizers and technology engaged our students and enabled them to organize and communicate their ideas more clearly and effectively. Our data showed that effective teaching was the key element in improving students’ learning. The common anchor charts we developed based on curriculum expectations showed students with great clarity the features their writing they had to include to be marked at Levels 3 or 4. The use of the APE teaching strategy, colour coding student responses, and the use of focus boards in our school are valued additions to classroom practices.

School Disciplinary Climate
We observed that when students are engaged in their learning and writing assignment tasks are clear, student talk is more purposeful and student behaviour improves. The second year, when we looked at writing data, teachers did not ascribe low results to poor parental support or low SES. Instead, a grade 2 teacher said, “It is clear we should have given our students more experience with the graphic organizer prior to this independent writing task.”

Collective Teacher Efficacy
Collaborative marking of CASI and teacher moderation of the writing tasks have provided the job-embedded professional development our staff needed to evolve into more effective teachers. Digging into curriculum documents has enabled teachers to implement standards, raise expectations, and report student progress more clearly and confidently to parents. A comparison of the writing samples we collected three years ago with the writing samples we collect now, has provided direct evidence of the progress our teachers have made in teaching and our students have made in writing. We believe our staff have consciously made strides in the delivery of the curriculum in order to help our students improve their learning and achievement.

Teacher Trust in Colleagues, Parents, and Students
Our staff was very congenial and grade teams were collegial. Now we ask those hard, but critical questions that challenge us to change our thinking and implement more effective classroom practices. Our students deserve our best efforts every day. When this project began, people said of our EQAO scores, “Our kids are better than this. Our school is better than this. We must become better.” Teacher collaboration is the expectation at Minto-Clifford. We need to work together to move from good to great.

Time for Learning
We experimented with ability groupings for Language instruction to meet diverse needs of students for both support and challenges. This year we asked ourselves, “What can we strategically abandon in order to have more time and energy for improving all students’ learning?” Through scheduling, we seek to minimize disruptions and promote student time on task and also accountable talk. We at Minto-Clifford value the continuity of uninterrupted learning and all staff work together to achieve this goal. Purposeful learning and accountable talk have displaced the crayola curriculum, activity for the sake of activity, and non-productive...
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

In the process, we learned to function as an effective and collaborative Professional Learning Community to build staff capacity to improve all students’ learning. In the second and third years of our Boys’ Literacy project, we worked to improve our classroom instructional strategies through the use of high-leverage strategies. Higher levels of planning and organization were evident as we strove to establish our “hours of power” – our Literacy and Numeracy blocks. Our school purchased curriculum-related, factual material that showcased different text types and genres. These materials (e.g., graphic novels, “Boldprint” magazines, “Now I Get It”, and “Skyrider” posters) enabled our teachers to model, share, and guide and then have students independently read and write the text type and genre they were directly teaching and assessing.

Therefore, it became clear that we needed to have a connected focus between reading and writing; that is, when we were teaching writing, we were teaching reading and vice-versa. Were you to visit our classrooms, you would see consistency and alignment in the lessons being taught and in the learning materials displayed and used for instruction. We have shared our experiences, resources, and our successful reading and writing teacher-developed materials with our Board’s Program Department, with other schools in Upper Grand DSB and Bluewater DSB, and at the LANSA Conference. We have proven through our action research that the key

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Kidspiration Software, Language Trek Software, graphic novels, “Boldprint” magazines, SMART boards, Alphasmarts, listening centres, non-fiction texts, and non-continuous texts such as Guinness Book of World

For professional development:
“Now I Get It” and “Skyrider” posters (for teaching text forms), Scholastic Trait Crates, WriteTraits®, and Classroom Kits

Team Member Quote: “After using the checric, which is broken down into Reasoning, Communication, Organization, and Conventions, I’ve never felt more comfortable marking my students’ writing. I can more easily pinpoint strengths and weaknesses in their work and I’ve been more confident communicating the information to parents!” – Lynne Lytle, Grades 3 and 4 Teacher

Administrator Quote: I am so pleased that the Minto-Clifford staff chose to address the gender gap in writing through their Boys’ Literacy Project. The percentage of grade 3 males achieving at or beyond the provincial standard has risen from 21% in 2005 to 55% in 2007, exceeding both the board and provincial results for males in the 2006-07 school year. Congratulations to everyone involved”. – Martha Rogers, Director of

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
checrics; collaborative marking; transparent; writing assessment; graphic organizers
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Halton District School Board

SCHOOL:
Oakwood Public School
Grades: 2, 3, 4, and 5

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Brian Van Wyngaarden
Jennifer Duguay
Jenny McQueen
Cindy Pedersen
Martina Felps
**Essential Question:**
Will comprehension skills and attitude towards reading improve for boys in grades 2 to 5 using guided reading groups made up of only boys, utilizing boys’ material of choice, and using the “let them talk strategy”?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

During our inquiry project, several strategies emerged as effective ways to improve boys’ literacy skills. Our observations lead us to believe that the strongest strategy we used was “let them talk”. During our first year of the project, we began a “Guys Read Club”. This was an extremely effective way to provide the boys with the opportunity to talk about reading materials and their own ideas. Special guests (sports teams, authors, etc.) were invited to speak with and read to the boys. During the third year of our project, we decided to open up the “Guys Read Club” to girls as well. We made this decision based on several requests from students who showed interest in participating in the club. We found our third year to be the least successful for our boys. We believe that the most significant factor in attendance decline was due to the co-ed club instead of the all boys club.

Another strategy we found to be effective is “boys choice of reading material”. We purchased new guided reading sets and take-home books. These new resources included topics of interest selected by Oakwood boys who participated in the “Guys Read Club”. The boys were very excited to have the opportunity to choose new materials that peaked their reading interest. We built a strong home connection through the use of take-home book bags. Our take-home book carts contain many materials that were chosen by boys. We believe that this has been a successful program because the boys have had an opportunity to share their interests through reading at home. The boys’ choice of reading material has been an important part of guided reading groups. Teachers have noticed a higher level of interest in guided reading groups made up of only boys who choose their own books based on their interests.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**
Throughout our inquiry project, our teaching practices evolved. We recognized the need to provide boys with materials they enjoy reading. During guided reading sessions we attempted to group boys together where possible and found they were far more interested in engaging with the group when they were reading something that interested them. We recognized the need to provide a variety of materials from which the boys could choose. We created a take-home book cart with a wide variety of reading resources for boys to take home with them. We recognized the need for allowing boys the opportunity to talk and share with each other. We have integrated these strategies into our classroom practices.

During our third year of the inquiry, we opened up the reading club to girls and recognized a dramatic difference in the behaviour and attendance of the boys. The boys were not as open to sharing when girls were there and their attendance was not as good. This proves for us that the reading club was more effective for boys when they were separated from the girls.

Teachers are engaging in consensus marking and collaborative planning. This has increased consistency across grade levels and has focused our teaching/learning cycles. Teachers are also using EQAO data to encourage professional dialogue and inform their practice.

**Student Quote:**
“The ‘Guys Read Club’ rocks! Reading is cool! I really enjoyed the guest speakers and treats. I liked talking about books with other boys.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Oakwood Public School has a very transient student population so we experienced some challenges during our project. Because our school is small, we have also dealt with a number of changes in staff. To overcome these challenges, we included a wider range of grades in our project and we ensured that all new staff were aware of the project and invited to become part of the team.

Our project has evolved over the past three years. We decided to change our essential question to include a wider range of grades due to the transient population. When we started our project we wanted to increase boys’ reading comprehension and attitudes. We learned how to implement effective strategies to improve boys’ achievement in literacy.

One highlight of the project was the boys’ excitement about reading during “Guys Read Club”. It was a beneficial experience for the teachers to see the boys talk to one another and share stories and ideas in a meaningful way. The teachers have been able to take this strategy and implement it into their reading programs in their classrooms.

During our project we gained insight into boys’ reading behaviours and attitudes. We learned that boys enjoyed reading more when they are given a choice of materials. They became more involved in the reading process and actively engaged in book talks when they were able to read materials related to their interests. During our “Guys Read Club”, we experimented with taking time during each meeting to read to the boys. We discovered that they really did not enjoy this. They preferred using their time to read books together with a friend and discuss the reading materials. We found that male role models were very motivating for our boys. When special guests were invited to the “Guys Read Club”, the participation was higher and there was an increase in their level of excitement.

The parents in our community have become more involved in helping their children learn to read. Our take-home book bag program has been a great success. Parents have commented on their children’s improvements and interest in reading at home. We continue to provide parents with feedback and support to encourage literacy learning at home.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

We will continue to focus on providing boys with reading materials of their choice. We will continue to promote and encourage teacher collaboration in the planning and assessment processes. We will continue to motivate our boys to read by providing them with opportunities to interact with male role models, authors, and guest speakers. During guided reading groups, we will continue to provide boys with the opportunities to read and discuss materials related to their interests.

As we approach the end of our three year journey, we are curious to know whether these same strategies would be as effective and motivating for girls.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“My son’s attitude has really improved over the past year. He sees reading as a fun activity rather than a chore. He always seems to have his nose in a book and would read all night if I let him.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

During the first two years, we observed an increase in the participation of boys in reading activities in the “Guys Read Club”. For the third year, we included girls in the club, and discovered a decrease in the boys’ participation. We also observed a difference in the boys’ reading behaviors — they were less likely to demonstrate enthusiasm and engage in meaningful conversations with peers. We now recognize the importance of providing boys with their own space and time to dialogue about their reading experiences.

To support our observations, we used EQAO results. Our graph on the next page shows EQAO results for primary boys in reading over three years. The graph depicts our overall increase in boys’ reading scores; although there was some decrease from the second to the third year. We prefer to look at the big picture of our progress, rather than focusing on one year at a time.

We also administered a student and parent survey.

The student survey was a useful tool in determining what materials were of interest to boys, their attitudes towards reading, and their main reasons for reading.

Reading Survey Questions for Students

1. Reading is one of my favourite activities.
2. I read only when I absolutely have to.
3. I like reading more now than I did last year.
4. I read mainly to get information.
5. I like going to the library.
6. Reading school books is hard.

The parent survey allowed us to identify family attitudes and perceptions about the importance of literacy. Through an examination of parent feedback, we were able to provide parents with useful strategies to promote reading at home. The survey demonstrated the need to inform parents and provide reading strategies and ideas that would benefit students at home. Due to a high ESL population, we found that many parents were unsure of how to provide extra literacy support at home. To support literacy learning at home, we hosted our first Family Literacy Night, which gave us the opportunity to share resources and strategies with parents. Looking at our data shown in the graph on page 6, it does not appear that parent perceptions have changed dramatically. However, more parents reported in the third year that reading was one of their son’s favourite activities. They also indicated that their sons were taking the initiative to read on their own instead of reading only when requested.

Reading Survey Questions for Parents

1. Reading is one of my son’s favorite activities.
2. My son reads only when he absolutely has to.
3. My son reads mainly to get information.
4. My son likes to go to the library.
5. Reading school books is hard for my son.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

EQAO Reading Results for Primary Division Males Over Three Years
(Percentage of males at or above the provincial standard)

Boys Reading Survey

Questions from survey

Percent of boys that agreed with the question

Year 1  Year 2  Year 3

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Year 4-05  Year 5-06  Year 6-07

Male Linear (Male)
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Parent Responses on Boys Reading Survey

Percent of parents that agreed with the question

Questions on Survey

Year 1
Year 2
Year 3
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

During our three year journey, we experienced many highlights and were faced with a number of challenges. We were delighted to discover the positive impact this inquiry process has had on our teaching practices. It provided us an opportunity to focus our professional dialogue on the needs of our students. Through our continued conversations, we implemented new strategies into our classrooms that supported the needs of our boys. One major highlight for our team was discovering how easy it can be to motivate boys to read and, by using the appropriate strategies, greatly increase their reading enjoyment. Throughout this project, we discovered improvements in our boys’ reading comprehension as well as writing.

We developed a collaborative approach and this promoted interactions within grade teams and across divisions. Out of this collaboration came a positive attitude and approach. Teachers willingly shared ideas and resources to support student learning.

We experienced minor challenges through this process. Due to a transient student population, our initial focus group of boys decreased in numbers. This forced us to change the focus of our project to a wider group of students. In addition, due to a number of staffing changes, it was necessary to inform new staff of the project and provide them with the opportunity to join the team.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
We recommend:
• Magazines
• Gear Up guided reading sets
• Guiness World Record books

For professional development:
• Me Read? No Way! Ontario Ministry of Education
• Even Hockey Players Read by David Booth

Team Member Quote:
“This experience was beneficial to both students and staff. It has been a pleasure to watch our boys get excited about reading and it has motivated us as teachers to provide our students with the right opportunities and experiences to actively engage students in reading. The teacher collaboration has been a great success.”

Administrator Quote:
“The boys’ literacy project motivated both our students and staff. Our boys have definitely had their choices of reading materials validated, have a higher level of self-esteem about their reading skills, have improved their reading skills overall, and are now much more comfortable talking about what they have learned. This is supported by the data (i.e., our EQAO and survey results). Without a doubt, our involvement in this project was very positive for both student achievement and staff learning.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
reading club; guided reading; talk strategy; motivating boys to read; choice

teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Kenora Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Our Lady of the Valley School, K - 6

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Dallis Novelli
Penny Parmeter
Judy Zilinski
Travis Batters
Aimee Favreau
Lorraine Gosselin
Jan Sparkman
Marie Lundin
Jamey Robertson
Cindy Melenchenko
Jordan Temple
Chris Moorely
Clyde Orr
Mary Cunningham

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of
**Essential Question:** Will boys' literacy achievement improve if we adopt a common, whole-school approach to writing workshops? We want to use the common language and format of the 6+1 Traits (by Ruth Culham). We feel that if we can help boys who are in level 2 on the EQAO results and in their report card grades we will be making some important progress. We will tie this to an authentic context and use community resources available to us to bring literacy learning alive.

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

The “authentic context” became one of the most important areas of learning for our teachers.

We focused on trying to bring the digital world into the classroom with our boys. We talked to them about their reading and free-time habits and found that they were (like the boys in Jeffrey Wilhelm’s study) very interested in computers and all things electronic. We tapped into that by creating blogs for the students to use for their writing and as a means of getting feedback in a less emotionally charged way. This was a marvelous breakthrough for our boys. They were interested in writing when they could see a reason to do so (to comment on each other’s work, for example). They also loved connecting to the digital world they use outside of the classroom. We also created DVD’s of student work and important messages that we wanted to share with parents. We talked about the idea of “selling” our message by creating a format that parents would want to see (one with their own children in it, doing something successfully) and about how it was similar to other ways that the media uses formats to “sell” things. It was a great connection to critical literacy.

We also linked into the idea of creating pictorial and video creations that performed the same functions as written ones. For example, students created photo essays to persuade people to be more environmentally friendly. These were used at our Aboriginal conference to celebrate Earth Day. The students knew ahead of time that their work was going to be used for a real purpose. They compared their work to established criteria (four leveled pieces deconstructed by the students to determine the criteria for each level) and were able to see that they could create a persuasive essay with pictures and captions that were as effective as a “traditional” essay.

The need to see criteria for assessment became evident and would be a follow-up area for us.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

We realized that we could not rely on traditional “chalk and talk” methods. We found that the balanced literacy model had to be used in all grades, not just in the primary ones. This meant that we had to re-think our use of time (create bigger blocks of uninterrupted time and focus on time on task) and work on developing teacher capacity with strategies that were unfamiliar to them. The Professional Learning Community model helped to focus our work by allowing us to use data to determine students’ areas of need and then look for strategies to meet those needs. This is a long process, but one that was started during the project. We felt that the students needed to be given practice in comprehension strategies as well as in writing techniques so we wanted to do “think alouds”. Shared reading was a good place for our group to start. We used multiple ways of attacking a text to show students different aspects of the elements that they needed to learn. We bought materials that helped us get started, like Sky Rider, Reaching Readers, and Literacy Place. We also bought a lot of non-fiction materials. This helped us to better reach our boys.

In terms of assessment, we are trying to do more common assessments and to do some moderated marking to make sure that we all agree on the expectations and what they actually look like. It is very frustrating for students to have different people give different opinions about the same work.

**Student Quote:**

“I liked having a different way to present my work. The newspaper was a great way to talk about Holes and I liked having the newspaper reporter explain how they do it.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?
We got off to a slow start. In year one, we were able only to buy a few of the materials and to meet a few times. In year two, we met regularly by division and discussed the issues and the problems we faced.

We made some headway getting comfortable with the 6+1 Traits and were using a common language related to assessment. The junior level teachers embraced the 6+1 Traits as a means of teaching writing and were using the assessment rubrics to create good final student work. The primary teachers were also able to use the 6+1 Traits well, but found it harder to adapt their teaching to using the rubrics with their students.

In year three (this year), our school was merged with another school in our board and moved to a brand new building. This move slowed the work at the end of year two as the focus was on the physical move. It also meant that the urgency of our project was lost. The demands of a new school were many. The new principal and vice-principal were supportive but unfamiliar with the project and its demands. The school staff was now made up of two staffs from two different schools and therefore half of the teachers were not involved in the project originally. The research languished. Many of the artefacts were lost in the shuffle of the move. The project ground to a halt and was all but forgotten. Teachers with good intentions promised to get back to the ideas of the project but with all of the new things occurring in the new school, no one remembered to keep it as a priority.

So, our story is one of broken dreams. We had great ideas and initial excitement, but we were not able to sustain it over the full time line.

However, the project inspired a lot of other off-shoots. The technological aspect has spawned several new initiatives. The focus on authentic learning has encouraged a number of teachers to create better assignments and to tie them to real-world assessments.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?
We continue to watch our boys. We have several classes that are very unbalanced in gender. (Two of our classes in the new school have a 3:1 ratio of boys to girls.) We are using the EQAO questionnaire results more effectively now and are looking for ways to enhance our understanding of the data and how to make changes.

We are using the Critical Learning Pathways materials and are focusing on trying to make changes in teaching strategies, one strategy at a time.

We can see that trying to get the whole school on board may have been just too optimistic and too great a challenge. We are now looking at bringing each teacher on board, one at a time, as they are ready. We thought that we had consensus when we began the project, but have realized that we probably did not. We are now working on trying to encourage those who are ready to make change so that we can reach the “tipping point” for change and make more of an impact.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“My son was excited about the books he brought home and even read to me. I love the new books that you have been using.” — From a Mom who was having trouble getting her son to look at books.
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Male responses on the EQAO Questionnaire over time:

Grade Three Responses Over Time - Male

Grade Six Responses Over Time - Males
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

We were able to increase our students' sense of themselves as good readers at both grades 3 and 6 from the year prior to the project to this year, according to EQAO results. Our students report themselves as “good readers” more frequently than they did. Our males have increased especially (from 74% in grade 3 in 2004/05 to 93% in 2006/07 and from 71% in grade 6 to 76%). Our grade 3 male students have increased their responses in several areas over time. See the graphs on the previous page.

Our grade 6 male students do not say that they are good writers at as high a rate as they did in the year before we started, but they do say that they like reading more in 2006/07 than they did in 2004/05. The grade 6 level of independent reading has increased, but not their writing. We have not made our junior male students feel like writers.

In terms of their success for the EQAO tests of reading and writing achievement, the male students in grade 3 have increased in reading from 52% to 82%. In writing, they have improved from 43% to 65%.

In grade 6, the male students have improved from 33% to 45% in reading and decreased somewhat from 33% to 32% in writing. Our efforts in writing are not leading us to success with the boys. (Ironically, the girls went from 46% to 76% during that same time period.)

We were moderately successful in our attempts to get all teachers to use a common language and to have a common understanding of the assessment tools in 6+1 Traits. It was a good try. Our teachers reported that they were on the way to using the assessment rubrics and were starting to collect data to create common exemplars of each level in each grade. Many of our teachers are still using the 6+1 Traits in their teaching and are trying to make sure that students can see the targets and understand the assessment process clearly so that they can work independently to improve their writing. (This data is from surveys of teachers and reports from them on the project as well as from a look at budget spending for resources and an inventory of the materials in the school.)

Many teachers are aware of the strategies associated with the project (specifically from Me Read? No Way!) and are making more efforts to incorporate them into their teaching. There has been an increase in the use of technology and in the use of non-fiction resources.

Overall, our data reflects the reality of the project. Our move from one school to another tended to disrupt the process and left us with little or no gain. While we had some successes, we did not accomplish all that we set out to do.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

We are able to see that the idea of working on an action research project is powerful even when it is not completely successful. We have seen many things spring from the work of this project.

When teachers intentionally and explicitly look at one area of their teaching and instructional practice, they draw important attention to it. Other teachers from other schools were given ideas and inspiration to try things that they would not have tried if the teachers in this project were not working on and talking about their work.

Participation in this project has also pointed out the important difference between collegiality and collaboration. When the project began, we all felt that there was a common agreement about what was to occur. As the project developed, we realized that the common understanding was not so common. There had been some agreement due to a sense of collegial comradeship and possibly due to some social peer pressure. It was not intended to be so, but the lesson of this is that a more explicit understanding must be reached before a project of this nature is begun.

The project helped us to talk more about writing and assessment. The idea of the critical learning pathway (which is a current Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat initiative) would not have been as easy to pick up and use if we had not done the talking and analyzing of material that we did in the boys' literacy project work.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:

For professional development:

Team Member Quote:

“Using the 6+1 Traits was beneficial because it is straight forward and easy to understand and apply. The boys don’t like the fuss and muss. They are capable of such good writing and of producing such great pieces of work when we give them the right way to do things.”

Administrator Quote:

“I noticed that the resources in our school started to change fundamentally. We have so much more non-fiction now and we see the boys in the school using and enjoying that non-fiction material.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:

authentic context, 6+1 Traits, technology, community, EQAO
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:

Toronto District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):

Parkdale Public School – Grades 7 and 8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:

Jason Williams
John Kunnas
Essential Question: Is it possible, by focusing on specific genres of books not usually discussed or covered in the regular classroom, to positively affect the attitudes of boys towards reading?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

Through this process, we learned that when boys are provided with materials of greater interest to their world, they are more willing to become active participants in the reading process. The topics we chose to focus on this year were materials that we felt related to our inner city students’ interests such as race relations, drug abuse, street crime, youth gang activity, and also action based novels.

We felt that these were difficult subjects for regular core teachers to broach in the classroom. We believed that having only boys and a male model discussing these topics would create an open environment for discussion. We also assumed that these materials would interest our students and would be relevant to their every day lives in our neighbourhood here in Parkdale.

We felt that, since many of our students were going on to high school the following year, it was important to have open and frank discussions with them about race, drugs, and gangs before they were exposed to these issues in secondary school. It gave the program validity and a forum in which we could open a dialogue with the boys about important topics. We also made an effort to choose gender specific topics and to select materials at reading levels appropriate for all our students, which varied from students reading at level 4 to HSPC indentified students.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

We are senior behaviour and senior French teachers. This inquiry project had very little impact on our instructional and assessment practices.

Student Quote:

“I think that it is a good idea to have a boys’ book club because boys don’t usually have a habit of reading. Boys can be nervous or shy in front of girls, but not so much in front of other boys. The reading club helps us read in a really fun way.”
**WHAT IS OUR STORY?**

Parkdale Public School’s boys’ book club began three years ago with the funding we received for this project. We began with the principal and four male teachers; today two of the original staff members continue with the program.

We began the club with a strong emphasis on extrinsic motivation to bring the boys together and share in reading books. For every lunch, we offered a pizza and encouraged them to take out mostly graphic novels and picture based books, along with some regular length novels. We soon found that some of the students came only for the pizza and we therefore ran into problems maintaining the focus where it was meant to be; that is, reading.

We did have the students give presentations in front of the group related to what they had read and why it interested them, which gave some focus to the group. The boys seemed to respond to these exchanges and became more comfortable sharing what interested them and why they chose a certain book from the bin. Both the grade 7 and grade 8 students were together as one big group. We had approximately 20 students taking part in the program who were selected by both book club volunteers and home room teachers.

Today, in the boys’ book club, we put a stronger emphasis on intrinsic motivation. We now provide only one pizza lunch for each group during the year. We have also changed our initial focus on graphic novels to more structured novel sets based on the students’ interests. When the boys began to read the same material, it gave them more opportunities to talk about and share what they had read. We also began reading in groups in which the teacher lead the reading and followed the readings with oral questions and answers about the content of the book and the literary devices used by the author. The students could see that their teacher was interested in reading the novel as much as they were and this increased the students’ motivation to read. Along with the novel sets, we continued to implement the borrow-a-book program. Weekly and/or bi-weekly, most students borrowed various books of their own choice and read them for pleasure. This gave us insight into what kinds of materials interested the students.

We also decided to split the grade 7 and grade 8 students into two groups, each led by a different teacher. We felt this was necessary to reduce the insecurity the grade 7 students felt about sharing their readings with their older peers in grade 8. Splitting the group created more harmony and also facilitated the inclusion of more students in each group. A total of 40 students took part in the two book clubs, with approximately 20 students in each.

**WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?**

We will continue to use novel sets as the main focus of the book club and will continue to purchase more novel sets that interest the students and are relevant to their every day lives. We feel that the students responded well to the novel sets and did not view them as typical “work”. The novel studies were much less formal than regular classroom routines—responses and ideas were shared verbally instead of in written form.

We would also like to expand our borrow-a-book program with a view to increasing the number and variety of books we offer to book club members. The borrow-a-book program proved to be an excellent supplement to the novel studies. The borrow-a-book program gives students a great deal of choice and a relaxed approach that motivates them to read material that interests them.

**Parent/Guardian Quote:**
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

We gathered data in two ways:

(1) To determine significant changes in students’ reading interests and attitudes, we administered a survey at the beginning of the year and at the end of the year.

(2) We conducted formal interviews with home room teachers to gauge whether they had noticed any impact that the book club had on their students’ day-to-day work.

The home room teachers reported that many of their students demonstrated increased positive opinions related to reading and read graphic and non-graphic novels more frequently in and out of the classroom.

The teachers also intimated that many students demonstrated increased ownership of their roles as readers of classroom materials as well as materials they read for personal pleasure. This was an important point for us in the book club since we were hoping to foster the idea that the students should become active participants in the reading process.

We discovered that students demonstrated increased confidence as readers in front of the class or in small groups in the classroom. The teachers also reported that students showed improvement in their abilities to read deeper into the novels they were studying in class.

Lastly, some teachers were surprised to find that several of the boys were purchasing books as entertainment; whereas, prior to the project, they showed little interest in reading beyond what was deemed necessary.

Our quantitative survey results are discussed in the next section.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

We administered a Reading Interests and Attitude Survey this year in November and again at the end of the year in May. We compared the pre- and post-responses on likert scales for each participant. The following describes the changes:

Question #1: How do you see yourself as a reader?

- 4 students (12%) changed their responses from, “I barely read my school assignments” to, “I’ll read my school assignments but that’s all”.
- 15 students (40%) changed their responses from, “I’ll read my school assignments but that’s all” to, “I’ll read for fun sometimes”.
- 7 students (20%) changed their responses from, “I’ll read for fun sometimes” to, “I’ll read anything I can get my hands on”.

The results above demonstrate a significant change in the attitudes of a majority of the students from the beginning of the year to the end. It shows a marked improvement in boys’ enjoyment of reading and a changing perception of reading as pleasurable and not “work”. The remainder of the students responded the same as they did previously, but not more negatively.

Question #2: Do you read every day?

- 12 students (33%) changed their responses from, “rarely” to, “often”.
- 7 students (20%) changed their responses from, “often” to, “frequently”.
- 3 students (8%) changed their responses from, “frequently” to, “Yes, without fail”.

The results above demonstrate a significant increase in the frequency with which the boys read. We had determined that this was a very important goal of the book club. We feel that boys who read more often will, in turn, increase their reading proficiency, vocabulary, and their willingness to continue with their education into high school. The remainder of the students responded in the same way for both administrations of the survey.

Question #3: How many books do you own?

- 5 students (14%) changed their responses from, “none” to, “a couple”.
- 4 students (12%) changed their responses from, “a couple” to, “an armful”.
- 5 students (14%) changed their responses from, “an armful” to, “a lot”.
- 1 student changed his response from, “a lot” to, “I can’t count them all”.

The results above demonstrate that many students are now more actively searching out books. It is important for boys to understand that reading should not be an onerous task, but that it can also be used as a form of entertainment and fun. This is a major barrier we must overcome as educators if we hope to engage our boys in the process of reading and learning in general. Once again, several students gave the same answers.

(continued on next page)
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Question #6: If you went to your local library, would you check out a book?

- 12 (33%) changed their responses from, "If I found a book I liked" to, “Chances are good”.
- 4 (12%) changed their responses from, “Chances are good” to, “Absolutely”.

The results above are favorable. Parkdale’s public library is quite close to the school and many students visit it for movies, books, and the Internet. It is important that more students have increased the number of books they are taking out of the library. It is very important that students be made aware of the resources available to them within their community just blocks from their homes. Many students’ responses remained unchanged for this question.
**WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?**

This project gave us a deeper understanding of boys as learners. They need to be motivated. Boys need to feel as though the work they are doing is of value to them personally and related to their personal lives, experiences, or fantasies.

We discovered that boys need to have positive role models that take an active role in non-structured classroom settings in promoting and fostering the need to read. Then, students will be more likely to let their guard down, express what they feel and, in turn, feel less self-conscious about their reading abilities.

**WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?**

For Boys:
Books by the author Paul Kropp. He is a Canadian author who writes books that are of high interest to boys and specifically boys in Toronto. The books are excellent and engaging resources and stimulate great discussions.

For professional development:

**Team Member Quote:** “I’ve noticed that the students in the book club seem more focused during reading times and they are selecting books based on their individual interests and comprehension. One student in particular, who was seldom focused during reading time at the start of the school year, is now always eager to discuss the books he is reading in the club.”  — Leap/ESL teacher who is not a member of the team, but has several students who attend the club.

**Administrator Quote:** “The boys’ book club at Parkdale P.S. provides a unique opportunity for students to improve their literacy skills outside of the regular classroom setting. It was especially exciting to see the high level of enthusiasm generated on the day of their excursion to the movies, which successfully extended their learning beyond the school.”

**List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:**
inner city topics; male role models; boys' book club; novel sets; borrow-a-book program
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Thames Valley District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Parkside Collegiate Institute – all grades, with a focus on ENG 2P and ENG 4C

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Bill Schneider
Mike Caldwell
Cynthia Curtis
Linda Harvey-Riouxf
Judy Carter
Rod Hirkela
Shawn Bragg
Laura Palmer
Marg Sawatsky
Essential Question:
What is the impact of non-fiction texts on boys’ literacy skills and academic success?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

We found that incorporating contemporary, visually appealing non-fiction texts into our English courses:

- increased the level of engagement of male students;
- increased the completion of culminating assignments, specifically in ENG 4C1;
- helped students relate to the text and connect information to background knowledge and prior experiences; and
- meant that students approached reading with more positive attitudes, which in turn produced better on-task behaviour.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

- Our team has made a shift from using primarily fiction texts to incorporating more non-fiction texts as part of our instructional practice.
- Our assessment continues to promote student learning.

Student Quote:
“These magazines are cool.”
“I like being able to read about ‘real stuff.’”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Until recently, we incorporated non-fiction texts into English courses at Parkside Collegiate Institute on a limited basis. We used non-fiction texts as part of a unit of instruction rather than embedded in instruction and activity planning throughout the semester. To shift that thinking, we first purchased a variety of non-fiction texts including: Boldprint magazines, career-oriented magazines, and class sets and small group sets of engaging non-fiction books. We then set about incorporating them into our weekly routine. We used some of the non-fiction books in all of our courses.

For our inquiry, we focused on the students in ENG 4C and included the texts: A Long Way Gone, Jesse James - The Man and his Motorcycles, Tony Hawk Biography, Bruce Lee Biography, Tattooing, and Video Game Design. In addition to the texts listed above, we also purchased a class set of career-oriented magazines with titles such as: Machinist’s Workshop, Landscape Architecture, and Metalcraft Magazine. These magazines served two specific purposes for our ENG 4C class: (1) they were a credible source of information for career and pathway destination research; and (2) they served as excellent exemplars for our students’ culminating project, which was the creation of a magazine that included interviews, persuasive articles, and advertisements.

We made a special effort to connect non-fiction materials to other course materials (i.e., fiction) to reach a wider interest level for our students and demonstrate connections among and between forms and genres. The magazines were continuously updated to maintain interest and recycled to other projects such as creating found poetry, storyboards, and other hands-on literacy based projects.

We also included Web sites as part of the non-fiction repertoire of reading, instruction, and research options. Some of the websites we accessed were: www.digg.com, www.fark.com, www.CBC.ca.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

- Our team plans to review the genre selection for instruction and reading choices to ensure that the balance of fiction and non-fiction is more equitable in other English courses.
- We will be meeting as a department to look for ways to connect the genres and forms.
- We will put more emphasis on explicit instruction in the comprehension strategies.
- We will focus more on instruction regarding how to read non-fiction texts (i.e., structures and features).
- As a board, we will continue to focus on finding a wider range of materials to target the interests of our male student population.
- We will support our teachers with opportunities to attend inservice targeting strategic reading and writing strategies to enhance practice and increase student achievement.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“I was surprised to find my son reading the newspaper online -- he usually uses the computer for playing games!”

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?
DATA GATHERING AND MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

After tracking the completion of culminating assignments for ENG 4C classes for an entire year, it was obvious that the incorporation of non-fiction texts had a positive influence on student learning and task completion rates. For example, Semester One ENG 4C classes had a culminating assignment completion rate of 68%, compared to a 78% completion rate for Semester Two. (Note: non-fiction texts were incorporated more purposefully in Semester Two.) Also, teachers noted an increase in student (particularly males) reading engagement from Semester One to Semester Two, with the reading selection choices including more non-fiction materials.

**Observational Data: Student Engagement**
- Students were more involved in their reading as they are able to choose what genre they preferred to read during self-selected reading.
- Students were more engaged when reading topics of interest to them.
- Students were more engaged during instruction time when non-fiction materials were used as part of the instruction.
- Students felt they were learning more than just content.

**Observational Data: Reading Skills**
- Students were exposed to a variety of reading strategies, which means that a reader at any level can learn new ways to look at a passage.

**Observational Data: Reading Interest**
- Students were more likely to complete a novel since they had chosen one that interested them and a genre they preferred.
- Students who claimed to never read and hated reading were interested in the novels they chose and were excited to talk about them with other students.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

- Our data confirmed what we read in the literature.

- Coming together to talk about successes and concerns strengthened our team and made us better teachers.

- By spending more time finding out the likes and dislikes of our students, we were able to provide a wider range of materials to support their interests, levels, and diversity and better address their specific learning needs.

- We placed a greater emphasis on classroom instruction and assessment, which led to attitude changes for many of our students. Classroom behaviour and management improved as our students spent a greater proportion of their time actively engaged in the classroom assignments.

- By providing our students with the time and explicit support that they needed to be more successful, the quality of their assignments improved substantially. These factors all contributed to a better assignment completion rate.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

Significant!!

As a team of educators, we came to realize the importance of using a broader scope of resources to engage students.

We also realized the importance of working as a team to problem-solve and find multiple ways to engage our students.

It was a great learning experience and one we wish to continue in the coming school year as we refine our practices.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Guys Write for Guys Read edited by Jon Scieszka
Career-oriented magazines

For professional development:
Reading Don’t Fix No Chevys; Literacy in the Lives of Young Men by Smith and Wilhelm
Even Hockey Players Read by David Booth

Team Member Quote:
“Thanks for this opportunity to discuss and develop curriculum.”
“Students have been more attentive in class.”

Administrator Quote:
“Clearly, the research shows that boys’ literacy needs immediate attention. I’m proud of the work our English Department at Parkside CI did with our young males and non-fiction literature.”
List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:

attitude; engagement; non-fiction; contemporary; visually appealing
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Halton Board of Education

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Pineland Public School — Grades K-8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Karen Dack
Janice Walker
April Furanna
Shauna Brown
Robert Iannuzzi
Anne-Marie Sienna

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
Essential Question:
Can we improve comprehension and make reading real by emphasizing instructional strategies that engage boys in hands-on activities, encourage discussion, and stimulate their imagination?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

1. Use data to provide explicit instruction for all students – give them the right stuff with precise teaching. DRA provides information on where to start with the boys. Data and surveys of what boys are doing in their spare time and what books are being read need to be part of data.
2. Boys need to feel that they have a voice in what is being offered as reading choices.
3. Boys must be introduced to reading strategies through read alouds and modeling strategies aloud, often and regularly.
4. Boys need readiness activities that allow for discussion and “doing”; in other words, for learning actively.
5. Boys need an element of challenge or a reason to read and do something with the information.
6. Boys should have opportunities to work in groups; talk about the topic; and build self-efficacy, confidence, and understanding.
7. Classrooms should have a game centre that changes every 6-8 weeks. Both boys and girls should be introduced to these activities (e.g., Lego, Warhammer, Pokemon, Gameboys, board games, and computer based games).
8. School libraries should host clubs for boys that allow group discussion, develop thinking, and have a reading component.
9. There should be a specific area in the library to introduce books to boys – when boys are not playing a game or engaging in an activity, they will browse the books in this area.
10. Teachers must include fantasy/science fiction in their collection and honour the reading experiences of boys outside the classroom (e.g., reading of rules, technical manuals, video game instructions, and building instructions). Making such a home and school literacy connection is a prerequisite for boys to see themselves as readers.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?
1. We are using differentiated assessments, which reflect boys' learning styles and preferences.
2. We provide boys' opportunities to demonstrate reading comprehension based on material that is of interest to them.
3. We use pre-assessment surveys to develop class profiles, build classroom libraries, and plan instructional strategies.
4. We use the “Let them Talk” strategy to give them the opportunity to engage in accountable talk before they read.
5. We are using teacher moderation (text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections) to build consistency in assessment across the school.
6. We provide opportunities for “hands-on” learning to complement boys' intrinsic interest in this learning style. High interest action figures and opportunities to build scenarios motivate boys to read material that supports these interests. We start with role plays and provide lots of opportunities for boys to reinvent themselves as a character.
7. We have found that the literacy world of boys is far reaching and extends much further than print text. We provide opportunities for boys to engage in projects involving Lego, Pokemon, Warhammer, and computer and other popular games. We have a Warhammer club for boys. Their reading comprehension is developed as they navigate through rulebooks and communicate a survey of these findings to members of their team or the opposing team.
8. We connect boys' home and school literacy lives through a classroom library with “The Right Stuff”.

Student Quote:
“I would have our clubs' Lego and Warhammer. I can help the new kids and lend them my manuals; maybe we could post the rules in the library.” — Student #1

“Wow! Indiana Jones Lego and it even has a story with it. Can I borrow this magazine?” — Student #2
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Our journey has been an exciting one. We have seen our boys develop very positive relationships with each other and improved a great deal in self-confidence as readers. Reluctant readers began to engage in a comfortable manner with texts that appealed to them. Through ongoing discussions, the boys improved their oral responses to reading; although, when asked to write their responses, the ability to make connections remained weak. The younger boys made greater progress, especially in reading skills. The older boys gained greater confidence and became better risk-takers.

We started with a group of timid learners who grew into a very knowledgeable group. We scheduled cross-grade meetings run by our literacy tutor, who was a young male and served as a positive role model for the boys. The boys listened to him read. He also introduced new books to the group and reinforced our “All Star” strategies. We broke down the barriers of age through games that provided the boys with opportunities to compete with each other — the boys wanted to share the experiences and would attend lunch hour sessions in the library. We used the Warhammer games and the Lord of the Rings series to engage the boys. We prepared them with the movie and then read the books. Most of the boys were familiar with the stories, but may not have read the books. By the second year, we were asking the boys to read a page or two and think of a good question for the group — the boy that read on a particular day received a Warhammer piece to build his collection. The books were circulating among the boys and they were reading them.

The older boys taught the younger boys some of the “All Star” reading strategies, which helped all the boys. The younger boys loved the games, but needed the older ones to help them with the scenarios. We purchased the Pokemon books and the boys in grades 3 and 4 loved reading these and playing the Pokemon card games. We controlled the situation so there were no trading cards. In the past, we had banned these cards at school but, in this controlled environment, we were able to hook the boys into reading because the books gave them more information on the Pokemon world. As teachers, we needed to understand how the cards were used. We used some of these books as read-alouds for all students and both male and female students rotated into this book group. “All Star” strategies were reinforced and read-alouds were used as a strategy to develop thinking skills. We used a variety of assessments that included oral recordings of higher-level thinking skills.

Our older boys are now in high school and, with the exception of one student, are achieving at the provincial standard.

Our younger boys are approaching Level 3 in reading and comprehension. Results on the DRA suggest that their comprehension skills are at least as good as our grade 7 boys who were in the project. We still have time to work with them on specific strategies to develop comprehension.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

1. We will continue to use assessment data (e.g., DRA and interest surveys) to determine specific areas of need and to differentiate program, instructional strategies, and materials.
2. We will continue to embrace the Internet and the arts.
3. We will improve our technology inventory and infuse four computers in all classrooms using SMART Board technology.
4. We will use anchors and exemplars to help students understand expectations — we will display these in the classrooms.
5. We will use read-aloud strategies to model thinking.
6. We will continue to engage teachers in consensus marking.
7. We will use the library as a meeting place for clubs in order to attract non-readers.
8. We will have a game center in every classroom connected with books or magazines about the games that interest boys.
9. We will encourage a variety of assessment tools to include student self-assessment and conferencing.
10. We will differentiate assessments so they appeal to boys’ identified learning styles.
11. We will develop cross-grade groups to build confidence among non-readers.
12. We will develop reading comprehension through the use of multiliteracies (e.g., game centres) rather than print text only.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“He lives for the Warhammer Club on Thursdays!”
# WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

## DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

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<td>16 Transition</td>
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<td>15 Transition</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>Gr 2 - Tran Gr 3 - Tran</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>Gr. 2 Term 2 Mar 06 - - Gr. 2 Term 3 June 06 - - Gr. 3 Term 1 Nov 06 - - Gr. 3 Term 2 Mar 07 - -</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Qualitative Data

Our qualitative data, namely observation, indicated that the boys who were initially reluctant readers began to engage with texts that appealed to them. The boys began to see that their home literacy lives were valued and connected to school literacy. This led the boys to develop self-efficacy, as they understood that the playing cards, manuals, and rulebooks they read at home were, in fact, being acknowledged and honored as texts at school.

Attendance at Lego club, Warhammer club, Games club, and Pokemon club was consistently high with 80% of members attending every week. These clubs were held in the library and provided time for boys to talk about their experiences, build scenarios, work in groups, and use library resources such as rule books and graphic novels. This approach built confidence and allowed the boys to become experts. The boys became sources of information for other boys who wanted to join and learn. By providing our non-readers with leadership positions and recognizing their expertise, we were able to build confidence in the boys that transferred into the classroom and developed respect among their peers.

Quantitative Data: Grade 2 Students

At the end of the project, our final DRA data showed that the grade 2 boys were approaching the provincial standard, were continuing to make progress, and were improving their comprehension skills. However, their written responses were not as strong as their oral responses. They were metacognitively aware of their skills as a reader. They could communicate, with appropriate terminology, the strategies they had used to decode and make meaning of the text. That is:

- 50% used “recall what I know about the topic” and
- 100% used “decided what was important to remember”.

The students were also aware that graphic texts contained important information. Despite our emphasis as a school on making connections with text, during the DRA they made very few connections. Although they understood what it means to make connections with the text, they did not employ this strategy to make meaning. The most frequent strategies they used to decode and help make meaning were re-reading, pausing and sounding out. They did internalize the “All Star” strategies and applied them to help make meaning of text.

EQAO results for our younger population confirmed that most of the boys were approaching Level 3. However, they showed poor results in answering implicit open ended questions.

Quantitative Data: Grade 7 Students

At the end of the project, the grade 7 boys were already attending high school and the results available to us were limited. We received the first semester report card marks and looked at those individuals who had completed the English credit. All but one of the boys had achieved at Level 3. It is difficult to change attitudes as young adolescents go on to high school. There are so many variables that affect success; however, for the most part the team felt that the boys that succeeded had left our school with a positive feeling about their abilities to be leaders and saw themselves as readers. Most of these boys had scored between 15 and 19 on the comprehension part of the DRA.

Quantitative Data: Grade 7 Students and Grade 2 Students

When we compare the DRA results for our older boys — when we started the project — with the current DRA results for our younger boys, we see a greater improvement in the younger boys, a greater interest in reading books, and better comprehension of material. The younger boys have very specific interests, whereas the older boys — when they started the project — really had no particular interest in reading. We believe that by starting early and building boys’ self-efficacy and confidence, there is a greater impact on their success.

As a school, we have explicitly taught the use of the APE organizer to help students respond to higher level questions. We have used three different read-alouds to benchmark students and have formed a collaborative professional community to look at student responses, align our assessments through consensus marking, and develop exemplars for all students to use when demonstrating their comprehension. Our use of a balanced literacy program and a move away from traditional pen-and-paper assessments have allowed our students to show what they know in a variety of ways (e.g., student conferencing, peer assessment, self-assessment, and the use of computer technology to capture oral responses to text and demonstrate understanding).
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

This project allowed us to experiment with approaches for teaching boys to read and for building their confidence.

It was great to see boys come into the library and interact and to see the personalities of boys — who are generally quiet and non-expressive in a classroom — shine through. Many developed a sense of humor and this added confidence was transferred into their classrooms.

As teachers, we are now interested in learning about games. The library is a hub and open, not only for reading, but also for social interaction and doing. More boys now visit the library.

Our professional dialogue is changing our “consensus marking”. Read-aloud strategies have been a focus. As teachers we are sharing assessments and asking questions. We are questioning whether written responses slow down students’ thinking and whether it is valid to allow our students to respond orally and capture these responses in wave files to respond to later during conferencing. We are recognizing the need for “talk time” and we are building this into our assessments.

We are providing students with more feedback and using classroom work to model what is expected and help them succeed.

We are interested in using game centers in our classrooms and in understanding the rules. We are looking for different ways to engage our non-readers. The management piece and the independent work habits will need to be established.

Technology can offer us more variety and we feel that all our classrooms need to be accessing the Internet and connecting with outside communities. Therefore, each classroom will receive four computers so we can imbed these activities into our balanced literacy programs every day.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- Pokemon books
- Lego magazines
- Warhammer manuals
- Board games with a reading component (e.g., Clue, Monopoly)
- Power magazines, Graphic novels (e.g., Bones), Cookbooks

For professional development:
- Even Hockey Players Can Read by David Booth
- Lessons In Reading Comprehension by Frank Serafini
- I Read It But I Don’t Get It by Chris Tovani
- When Kids Can’t Read, What Teachers Can Do by Kylene Beers

Team Member Quote:

Administrator Quote:
“It is amazing to see how reluctant readers become so engaged when their personal literacy interests are honored at school. Teachers need to broaden their conception of literacy and include resources such as games, manuals, and playing cards to appeal to their male populations.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
fun and games, experts, multiliteracies, do then read, talk first
Final School Report: 2008
Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Provincial Schools Branch

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Ernest C. Drury School for the Deaf — JK-3
Robarts Schools for the Deaf — JK-3
Sir James Whitney School for the Deaf — JK-3
Resource Services Pre-School Home Visiting — Ages 2-4

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Christine Erhlick
Janice Drake
Darren Holst
Heather Gibson
Julia Robinson
Linda Ritchey
Arnold Potma
Antony McLetchie

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
Essential Question:
Will the use of manipulative materials, the use of videos, and having parents as active partners enhance communication skills with boys?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- “At home” communication is enhanced by including parents as partners with first and second language supports.
- It is critical to include a kinesthetic approach to activities and use manipulatives and puppets to support literacy.
- Boys' involvement with literacy is enhanced through the use of male Deaf role models to sign stories and information.
- Material that is short and humorous appeals to boys.
- Creating activities for parents to do with their children at home strengthens communication between parent and child.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

- It is clear that we need to have more Deaf male educators.
- When parents are involved, have support materials, and communicate at home with children, literacy skills strengthen.
- Weekend sessions with parents and their children enhance parent involvement.
- The Backpack project needs to be expanded.
- Manipulatives are essential for enhancing literacy skills with Deaf students.
- We realized we need to have both visual and written forms of literature presented to the boys to enhance literacy skills.
- The home-school activity allowed teachers to extend the learning back to the classroom. Teachers repeated the activity parents did at home in the classroom.

Student Quote:
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

We created backpacks with manipulative materials for parents and children to share. The backpacks went home with planned activities for the parents to do with their children. We organized weekend workshops for parents to attend with their children and introduced them to the backpack concepts. The workshops were very well attended and thoroughly enjoyed by all. We field tested the video tapes and parents had positive comments about them. It was unfortunate that, due to many technical difficulties, we were not able to complete the DVD packages to go with all of the backpacks. We will complete the DVDs in September and will include them in the backpacks. The person leading our project went on leave in late February, which made it difficult for us to complete the project. However, parents and children continued to use the backpacks and the Education Coordinators completed the follow up with the parents. The project will continue in September and will be enhanced by putting DVDs in all the backpacks.

Typically, parents of Deaf children are not fluent ASL signers and this project has provided parents a venue to enhance their interaction and communication with their children.

This project created a great deal of excitement among students, parents, and teachers. All realized the importance of using various forms of materials with boys to create and sustain their interest.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

- We will host more parent workshops.
- We will develop more DVDs that will have voice and ASL lessons and activities and send them home with students.
- We will conduct further teacher training to develop understanding of the importance of the use of manipulatives when teaching literacy. We will do Manipulative Visual Language training in the fall.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“Very beneficial in many ways: interaction; two-way conversation; and brain development.”
“It was a really good activity and I like how the information gave us ideas.”
“My child asked for the backpack the next night.”
“We love the backpack activities.”
“Great job!”

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
### WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

**DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:**

1. Fair  2. Good  3. Excellent  NA. Not Applicable

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<th>3</th>
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<tr>
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<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>Was the instruction attached clear and helpful?</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>Was your child able to learn some new words?</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Was the activity of benefit to both you (parent) and your child?</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>How do you feel about discussing with your child?</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>Do you use American Sign Language to communicate with your child?</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
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</table>
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

The data indicates that the majority of the parents thought that the activities were good or excellent.

The results indicate that the project was successful but needs to be expanded.

The material needs to be short in length, and contain humor and action activities.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

The teachers realize the importance of having activities for parents that allow them to work with their children at home.

Teachers now understand the importance of visual activities to sustain the interests of the boys.

We also came to understand the importance of assisting parents to acquire ASL skills when ASL is not their first language. This has a significant impact on the progress of the student if the parents cannot communicate with their children.

We realize the need to plan more parent workshops on weekends so that educators can work with parents and their children. The workshops give parents skills and understanding related to the material and allows them work with their children at home.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
More backpacks with a variety of activities for the boys
More visual activities that can be partnered with reading material to enhance literacy/numeracy skills
More DVD’s to send home with parents with read aloud material (print)/ASL signed format that can be viewed repeatedly

For professional development:
Manipulative Visual Learning workshops
Workshops to expand the understanding of gender differences related to literacy/numeracy
Workshops on various activities that will peek and sustain the interest of boys

Team Member Quote:

Administrator Quote:
“The project was successful but needs to be expanded.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
ASL Videos for home/school connections; backpacks; humorous materials; action activities; Manipulative Visual Learning workshops
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
District School Board Ontario North East

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Queen Elizabeth Public School — Junior Grades

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Lee-Ann Wearing — Principal
Junior Teachers
**Essential Question:** Will offering a rich and varied mix of reading materials, which appeal to boys, build strong readers/writers who are engaged in a way that develops positive attitudes towards reading/writing and positive self images as readers/writers? This question evolved to include a focus on improved reading scores as measured by CASI and DRA and the development of a sense of purpose when reading and writing.

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

**Consistency and Refined Practice**
- We shared in the development of a junior language continuum, which enable us to ensure a consistent approach to literacy instruction in both the primary and junior grades. The continuum helped us to refine our language instruction in the areas of reading comprehension, traits of writing, literary elements, and organizational features. These linked focus areas required a gradual release of responsibility and a learning model that has evolved over these past three years. This language continuum facilitated the easy transition of teachers between grades and permitted new additions to our staff to easily plan for effective instruction in language, as our resources, PLC meetings, and focus surrounded this shared language continuum.
- This language continuum was developed by reflecting on what junior students require to achieve Ontario curriculum expectations through refined instruction implemented in a comprehension literacy classroom.

**Working as a Team**
- We developed a team approach and it was important for improving students' literacy skills and supporting their learning. This meant that we shared planning and our support for struggling students through our regular assessment reviews.

**Resources**
- Finally, we purchased resources based on an evaluation of the resources we had, our needs, and how the resources would integrate with our language continuum. Also, we used student interest inventories to purchase resources that were of interest to the children.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

**Instructional Practices**
- We refined our divisional language continuums.
- We purchased resources based on a gap analysis to support our language continuum.
- We shared teaching in the immersion setting between an English teacher and a French Teacher to link subjects to both languages of instruction.
- We implemented a gradual release of responsibility.

**Assessment Practices**
- We developed common rubrics in the division.
- Students developed anchor charts and content requirements by level.
- We guided our instructional focus or re-teaching through assessment.
- We shared responsibility for success and struggling students.

**Student Quote:**
“Ms. Wearing, can you believe it? I made it to the top in reading. I can’t believe it! I am looking forward to grade 7 and I actually like to read. I have a great teacher who helped me learn to enjoy different kinds of books, or genres, as she would call them.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

We began as nine classroom teachers across the District School Board of Ontario North East, who recognized the gender gap in both student achievement and attitudes towards reading and writing. We committed to work as a professional learning team to reduce this discrepancy within the three year time frame of this project. For our first year, we provided an influx of resources geared towards boys’ interests (based on student interest inventories and an analysis of the resources that were already available). We purchased resources to fill in the gaps.

We administered student attitude surveys before and after receiving the new resources and noticed an increase in reading enjoyment related to receipt of the new resources.

Because our group was dispersed across our large board area, attrition from this project was a significant challenge. Transition for new members was a struggle for our team. Many administrators and teachers in the initial research project changed positions or left for other roles in education. However, we continued to link our learning to our board’s improvement plan as well as ministry initiatives in the areas of literacy and numeracy. In this way, we built from where we were, rather than back tracking. We found it was important to share the ministry published strategy documents and support the new team members in understanding how all the documents link together. As many of the goals we identified linked to our current board-driven instructional focuses and capacity building, we managed to communicate intermittently on the achievement of the focus group.

This final year, for the junior grades at Queen Elizabeth Public School, we focused on boys during our assessment and instructional PLC’s and our school improvement plan for all students for the past three years. By returning to a grassroots focus, we were able to make significant gains in the achievement and attitudes of boys in the area of reading and writing and in student engagement. Within QEPS, we had developed a language continuum and refined it over the three years to help focus our instruction. We found that this could not be the same in each school, nor should it be. An individual school-centered approach has been the most beneficial for our students, rather than a project with a large-scale focus.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

- We want to use the five themes that emerged from our interviews: personal interest, action, success, fun, and purpose for our language pathway development each six to eight weeks in 2008/09. By keeping these underlying themes at the forefront of our planning process, we will be able to ensure continuous engagement in all literacy activities for all learners.

- We want to develop opportunities for moderated marking in our divisions as we move to focus on assessment, rather than using only DRA and inventory surveys to guide our practices.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Personal Interest
According to the Personal Inventory and Reading/Writing Attitude Survey, students’ reading attitudes showed an increase in confidence and positive attitudes from 70% in 2006 to 91% in June of 2008.

Success
We shared DRA and CASI results through individual teacher-student conferences, which permitted a shared celebration of successes and areas to continue to develop.

In our grade 6 class, which we have been tracking for three years, our boys moved from regularly achieving one grade lower than our girls to all students achieving at grade level (according to June 2008 assessments).

More importantly, the regular celebration of success throughout the years clearly supported the boys’ inner competitive drive to improve.

Fun
As teachers, we ensured that with our literacy focus (genre and writing form specific) we had a variety of resources from which students could choose and which related to their level of achievement and their interests.

The Attitude Survey question about “reading/writing for enjoyment” indicated a significant improvement over the three years. Initially, results showed that 75% of boys did not read or write for enjoyment. However, in 2008, 65% of the boys were reading and writing for enjoyment outside of school.

Purpose
Through the use of anchor charts, common assessments, and student-led conferences, our boys were more apt to see the purpose in their reading and writing assignments and how they related to the real world. This connection was paramount in helping them identify the importance of becoming proficient readers and writers and also developed their sense of “like” for various forms of writing.

In 2005, the Attitude Survey results indicated that only 10% of our boys responded, “I read/write for different purposes”. In 2008, 73% read and write for different purposes. More importantly, they understand WHY they read and write for different purposes and audiences. In developing this sense of purpose, students are more connected to task completion and are more engaged.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

As literacy educators of both boys and girls, it is vital that we increase opportunities for awareness, analysis, and action regarding issues of gender for ourselves and for our students. We can do this in many ways. However, we need to be cautious of overly simplistic solutions that suggest that we can motivate boys to read simply by introducing “boy-friendly” literature and we need to be wary of literature that serves to reinforce undesirable stereotypes for boys.

As educators, we must continue to evolve in our practices based on grass-roots research supported by mainstream initiatives and guiding practices.

As administrators — the gatekeepers — our primary role is to establish where we are and what support and guidance is required to ensure that all students achieve and, more importantly, understand the purpose and practical applications of our teaching. Finally, we need to continue to support education for the love of it, not becoming overburdened with provincial and school assessments, but rather continuing to support a culture where these tools are used to support our instructional practices.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For boys:
Favourite magazines for boys include:
The Hockey News
Kayak
Les explorateurs and Les débrouillards (French Immersion)

For professional development:
Morphing Literacy: Boys Reshaping Their Literacy Practices by H. Blair and K. Sanford in “Language Arts” 81(3), 2004

Team Member Quote:

Administrator Quote:
“A focus on boys’ literacy links to all other initiatives supported by the ministry. It is simply important to understand the connections between this evolution in practice as it pertains to groups of students who have varied needs, including boys.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
large team; link to other ministry initiatives; action; purpose; personal interests
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Renfrew County District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Admaston Public School — Grade 1
Central Public School — Grade 1
Queen Elizabeth Public School — Grade 1

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Admaston Public School — Heather Cormier, Lisa Murphy
Central Public School — Jennifer Wroe, Bronwyn Scott
Queen Elizabeth Public School — Heather Hayman, Lucie Sauve, Margaret Maloney
**Essential Question:** Will achievement and attitudes of boys towards reading and writing improve through the use of non-fiction reading and writing strategies and materials?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Students need to have access to non-fiction texts in class for independent, guided and shared reading as often as they do to fiction.
- Students need to have access to non-fiction text for their home reading.
- Students, at an early grade, are eager and can learn the conventions of non-fiction and apply this knowledge to discover facts and information from non-fiction texts.
- The use of non-fiction texts motivates boys and encourages the reluctant readers to become more engaged in reading.
- Non-fiction writing and presentation of facts was more successful through a project versus a traditional written report.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

We found that when we allowed students to choose a question and then research their “wonder”, the approach provided many teaching opportunities. We have now included more non-fiction texts in all aspects of our daily language instruction, including read-alouds, guided, shared, and independent reading.

We explicitly taught the non-fiction conventions and had students create their own examples to show understanding as part of a response journal/notebook.

We found that using non-fiction read-alouds provided students with a model for their own writing and encouraged a positive attitude towards writing overall. Students recognized that writing could follow various formats and could easily generate ideas.

Our assessment practices involved reading records (PM Benchmarks), rubrics, student interviews, anecdotal observations, and checklists. We were familiar with these assessment practices and were already using them in our classrooms.

**Student Quote:**
"It's fun to look at cool facts!"
"It was cool because everyone was asking me about my project and I could tell them the facts."
"I know what I am doing for next year already."
"I liked looking for facts and pictures on the Internet with my reading buddy."
"I never thought my project would turn out this good!"
"Now I know how to read all the parts of the book."
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

This literacy project has given us an opportunity to form a Professional Learning Community.

Background
It begins with our teaching. Throughout the year, we engaged our students using non-fiction texts in read-alouds and shared and guided reading. We focused on teaching reading comprehension through non-fiction texts. Students developed skills in their literal understandings from texts but also strengthened their interpretative and evaluative understandings.

Details of Final Project
For our final culminating project, we allowed students to independently select a non-fiction text in order to answer a question they had been “wondering” about. Students had the opportunity to apply skills taught throughout the year to answer the question. We gave students “wonderboxes” in which to place their questions. Near the end of the year, students selected one question to investigate. Students gathered and presented their findings as part of this project. They shared their findings in a variety of ways by making posters, murals, sculptures, wall hangings, written reports, and the list continues.

A Celebration of Learning
Our three schools used the sharing of the children’s final projects as a celebration of the learning that took place. We invited parents, community members, members from our schools, and administrators to join us. As a whole, with all the children’s efforts on one room, the accomplishments were staggering. The final projects for our 60 students, aged six and seven years, are inspiring and reveal the power of using non-fiction in our classrooms.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

Students who were involved in Year 1 of our Oneder Kids Project are now entering the junior grades. To provide opportunities for the junior and intermediate teachers, we will share our knowledge and successes with this project at the Provincial PA Day in September 2008.

For additional next steps, we will:
- continue to use non-fiction for book choices;
- continue teaching conventions for non-fiction texts;
- continue to use wonderboxes as a basis to teach inquiry skills;
- continue to use a final product linked to social studies and science curricula; and
- provide opportunities for celebrations of learning.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“I can’t believe a grade 1 student can do this! I’m amazed.”
“I’m so encouraged that they are starting this so young and are so excited about learning. It’s great!”
“I wish they had done this when I was in school.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Qualitative Data

- Interest Surveys (perceptual data): Results confirmed our initial beliefs that students are interested in non-fiction. Results also provided information about students’ attitudes toward reading and their perceptions of themselves as readers and their parents as readers.

- Home Reading Sheets: The sheets encouraged parents to become more aware of basic reading strategies and make connections with their children.

Quantitative Data

- Rubric for Written Report and Rubric for Culminating Project: The rubrics supported and helped to develop students’ skills in writing and completing a non-fiction project. Students developed skills in formulating questions for inquiry, synthesizing information, and presenting their facts in their own words.

- Reading Records: We used PM Benchmarks to guide reading instruction in the classroom. We used data to monitor progress in reading achievement.

- Snuggle Up and Read: Provided an incentive for a home-school connection and allowed for accountability for what was read at home. Data was used to monitor student choices between fiction and non-fiction.

- Non-Fiction Conventions Checklist: Allowed teachers to monitor the understanding of various text features and how students use non-fiction books.
**FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?**

### PM BENCHMARKS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>September</th>
<th>February</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>June</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>8-11</td>
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<td>12-14</td>
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<td>15-17</td>
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<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Students</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>63</td>
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### PM Benchmarks – Boys Only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>September</th>
<th>February</th>
<th>April</th>
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<tr>
<td>Above 18</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Students</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

### Home Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-fiction</td>
<td>1453</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>872</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiction</td>
<td>684</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2137</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1662</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Total books read during project = 3799

### Students in Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Total in Project</th>
<th>Percentage in Project</th>
<th>Percentage of Books Read</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>56%</td>
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### Culminating Research Project

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Checklist for Text Features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Non-Fiction Writing Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Our data confirms our inquiry project essential question; that is, the incorporation of non-fiction resources and the teaching of reading and writing strategies have a positive influence on the achievement and attitude of boys toward reading and writing.

We observed the following patterns:

- Non-fiction books were chosen more often by the boys for home reading.
- Boys read approximately twice as many non-fiction books as fiction in their home reading.
- Overall, non-fiction was chosen 61% of the time by both boys and girls together.
- The boys read, proportionately, the same number of books at home as did the girls. This data indicates to us that the boys were as equally motivated as the girls to read at home.
- PM Benchmark data indicated that 67% of the boys entered into grade 1 reading below grade level. In June, only 37% of the boys in grade 1 were reading below grade level.
- In the written non-fiction report, 63% achieved at Level 3 or 4. In the non-fiction project, 79% achieved at Level 3 or 4. We infer from this data that students achieved higher results when given the opportunity to choose their “wonder” topic versus doing the written assignment provided by the teacher.
- The checklist for the text features shows that 77% of all students achieved at Level 3 or 4. This information shows how successful the students were at understanding and using the non-fiction text conventions.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

We feel that the boys are not necessarily reluctant readers. They will thrive in an environment that combines relevant teaching techniques and the use of engaging resources. We offered a stimulating and enriched program by placing equal emphasis on both fiction and non-fiction texts.

This Inquiry project has shown us, as educators, the importance of allowing students to share their learning with others through the culminating project and the value of allowing parents and community members to share their successes.

We have also observed that students are more successful when given the opportunity to choose the topics for their research and ways to demonstrate their learning.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Now I Get It Comprehension Package (Mondo)
Sets of books for guided reading (e.g., Sails — Nelson and Literacy Place — Scholastic)
Books for independent reading (e.g., Sails — Nelson)

For professional development:
Reality Checks by Tony Stead
Is That a Fact? by Tony Stead
Me Read? No Way! — Ministry of Education

Team Member Quote:
“The Oneder Kids Project really inspired my more reluctant readers to read each night and become more engaged with the books. They loved learning about the conventions.”
“The boys were so eager to show me facts from their books. They loved using the Index or Table of Contents to see if the book had what they were looking for. They were impressed with their ability to read their non-fiction books.”

Administrator Quote:
“The Oneder Kids Project has given the grade 1 teachers in our three schools the opportunity to form a Professional Learning Community. Teachers have worked together to develop a plan to engage all students in the area of non-fiction reading and writing. Teachers have used assessment data to inform their practice and have found that actively engaging students in learning has had a positive impact on student motivation to read. A high degree of parental involvement through the home reading component has been an important factor in the success of the project.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
boys; primary; literacy; non-fiction; projects
Final School Report: 2008
Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Windsor Essex Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Queen of Peace School — Grades 8, 7, and 6

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Mrs. Mona Taouil
Mr. Jeff Chambers
Mr. Steve Dumont
Mrs. Teresa Festa
**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

We discovered many new and effective strategies we believe positively impact boys’ writing and reading achievement:

- Relevant, interesting, and meaningful reading resources increased motivation to read and to communicate what was read.
- Guiding boys to document, on their Reading Logs, what and when they read and write and allowing them to choose texts they find relevant and meaningful led to meaningful reading and writing and also parental involvement (since parents were asked to comment on and sign all Reading Logs).
- Helping boys make connections to what is read in Literature Circles and to use engaging fiction and non-fiction materials: Rapid Writing Journals, Reading Response Journals, and Writing Portfolios with ten samples of various genres by June.
- Helping boys make connections through various instructional strategies such as Reading Response Journals, Book-Boasts, Current Event Presentations (based on non-fiction), Readers’ Theatre presentations, and a PLC developed strategy we named: “Read and React” (weekly basis). These strategies allowed our boys, individually and as a pair or group, to gather understanding, talk with peers in small groups about what was read, plan their writing using graphic organizers, and then ultimately write effectively to communicate their connections (Text to Text, Text to Self, Text to World/Media).
- Graphic Organizers used consistently allow boys to visualize connections/relationships between concepts, characters, genres, stories, and events; allows them to plan effectively before formulating answers and connections; and breaks down writing tasks into smaller more manageable chunks. They are especially effective for reluctant writers and readers.
- Graphic Texts (non-fiction and fiction) promote accountable talk in collaborative groupings (both homogeneous and interest based), integrate various text forms, and allow for inference making, connection building, and increased motivation to read due to the genre’s resemblance to video games, super-hero comics, and new movies, etc.
- In addition to report card marks and EQAO results, it is useful to use PLC meetings to collaboratively mark writing samples, to use anecdotal, and to use relevant rubrics.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

- It is clear that some boys require additional strategies used on a consistent basis in order to achieve in writing and reading.
- Boys are more motivated to read and write when teachers provide new, fun, relevant, and high-interest texts (e.g., Boldprint series, Timeline Graphic series, sets of novels, sets of biographies/autobiographies, and magazines).
- Boys respond effectively when provided a choice of writing tasks (Differentiated Instruction) and find writing more manageable and fun when allowed to map thoughts on Graphic Organizers. Graphic Organizers are beneficial when used in a pair/share while discussing connections to text.
- Boys respond enthusiastically when afforded the opportunity to talk, interact, and be social with others (e.g., book brags, Literature Circles, and student-driven presentations).
- Collaborative marking sessions using a collection of techniques are important to authenticate achievement (e.g., observations, anecdotal, visualizing data to drive further instruction, rubrics, checklists, and moderated marking).
- Assessment and data are integral and natural parts of our profession (e.g., Reading Response Journal Writing each Friday). Valuable insight is gained into whether boys are able to make connections with what they read and know how to communicate in writing their thoughts and connections.
- Read and React Strategy – As a PLC, we created a new strategy to increase motivation to read non-fiction text and to increase ability to make meaningful connections in groups, pairs, and individually.

**Student Quote:**

“My teacher makes me want to read, and I love reading the graphic novels, they’re cool to read because they’re about what we learned in history. And, the book boast presentations were fun to watch!”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Queen of Peace Catholic Elementary School in Leamington (JK-Grade 8) has a population of 462 multi-cultural diverse students of varying socio-economic status. When the initiative began, the EQAO grade 6 results for 2004-05 indicated that 35% of males achieved a Level 3 in writing and 0% a Level 4. In reading, 53% of males achieved Level 3 or 4. The result of 0% at Level 4 in writing propelled our inquiry into action. We gathered data starting in 2005. We used EQAO writing and reading scores, grade 7 literacy test assessment scores, grade 8 report card marks in English, and the grade 9 practice literacy test scores. Our inquiry project funds enabled us to purchase new and engaging resources (fiction and non-fiction texts) in addition to valuable teacher resources relating to Literature Circles, Graphic Organizers, and writing and reading development.

We found the resources offered highly motivating material on which to base engaging literacy activities such as Literature Circles, Pair/Shares, and Guided Reading groups. We found the strategies that allow students to talk about text provides natural support for at-risk students by allowing them to choose great text with relevant characters and content, reading with the support of others, confirming thoughts, sharing insights, and extending understandings. Our Literature Circles consisted of five to eight learners with each responsible for a certain task (e.g., building ownership), sharing their tasks, collaborating, and extending their understandings.

We built on the correlation between the range and quality of a student's reading and the student's development as a writer. We discovered that student-selected resources provided boys with rich models to draw on when developing their writing skills.

We discussed the importance of teaching features of various genres and writing forms and how to read for both information and interest. We used Graphic Organizers across the curriculum and found them useful for demonstrating relationships among concepts—spatially and conceptually.

The mark of success is when a reluctant writer runs to the Reading Resources rack to grab the latest copy of Hockey News and cannot wait to read and then write about his feelings and reactions. What is more exciting is to witness that boy show another friend the article and share insights and feelings. Are they reading? Yes. Are they talking about text? Yes. Does the text inspire them to organize their thoughts on paper (e.g., Graphic Organizer)? Yes. Are they inspired to elaborate on their thoughts and make connections to the text (e.g., Reading Response Journal)? Yes. This one action repeated many times during our inquiry project shouted out our success and the progress our boys were making in writing and reading achievement. Hopefully, our boys will continue to make progress.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

Our initial goal was to use Graphic Organizers, Literature Circles, and engaging student-selected resources to allow our students to make connections between personal experiences and reading selections. It is through this personal connection that true meaning can be attached and true writing and reading achievement can take place.

We will continue to:

- focus on our students' ability to read critically, communicate effectively, and make relevant connections with text to themselves, other text, and to the world;
- use Graphic Organizers and Literature Circles based on fiction and non-fiction text and provide meaningful resources;
- use our “Read and React” strategy and, next year, will implement it into the lower junior grades on a school wide basis;
- celebrate successes by displaying them on our Royals Write bulletin board (school-wide); and
- share our findings with the rest of the school during our regular divisional and school meetings.

We feel, too, that our experiences can be shared with parents at our parent council meetings and possibly during our next annual Meet the Teacher social event.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“It's great to see my son actually reading! I now realize that as long as he can relate to what he reads, he actually enjoys it and will do it. I certainly see him reading more now than ever before, and I love to read how he feels about what he has read, when I check and sign his Reading Response Journal, each week.”

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Qualitative Data
- Reading Logs, specifically those of struggling students (as per the feedback suggestion made to us in September), demonstrated: (1) whether our boys were varying their reading choices, (2) whether they were reading more regularly in light of new resources available to them, and (3) whether they were engaged in their reading selections. The Reading Logs provided an opportunity for students to rate their selections and involved their parents in their reading.

- Types of Readers and Writers Survey (pre- and post-initiative) identified: (1) whether students were changing their views of themselves as readers and writers, and (2) whether they recognize and understood Graphic Organizers and their function.

Quantitative Data
- Report card marks (Term 1 and Term 2) for our current grade 8 students. Report card marks were determined using Reading Response Journals and Read and React where Levels and rubrics were attached to each entry.

- EQAO results at the start of our project for grade 6 students who are our current grade 8 students.

- Grade 7 Literacy Assessment for our grade 8 students compared with report card marks in English this year.

- Grade 9 Practice OSSLT results for our grade 9 graduates compared with their EQAO results three years ago.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Qualitative Data: Pre-Initiative Reader and Writer Attitude and Aptitude Surveys

Question #3: I think Graphic Organizers:
- 29% of students — are useful ways to organize thoughts
- 29% of students — are to use only before writing a story
- 17% of students — are things only professional writers or teachers use
- 25% of students — I don’t know what they are

Question #6: I can write best when:
- 55% of students — I am left alone
- 27% of students — I talk about what I have to write with others
- 0% of students — I use Graphic Organizers
- 1% of students — the teacher shows me first

Qualitative Data: Post-Initiative Reader and Writer Attitude and Aptitude Surveys

Question #3: I think Graphic Organizers:
- 88% of students — are useful ways to organize thoughts
- 12% of students — are to use only before writing a story
- 0% of students — are things only professional writers or teachers use
- 0% of students — I don’t know what they are
NOTE: A 59% INCREASE IN AWARENESS OF GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS

Question #6: I can write best when:
- 18% of students — I am left alone
- 62% of students — I talk about what I have to write with others
- 20% of students — I use Graphic Organizers
- 0% of students — the teacher shows me first
NOTE: 35% INCREASE FOR “TALK ABOUT WHAT I HAVE TO WRITE WITH OTHERS” — ECHOES GOAL OF INQUIRY
NOTE: 20% INCREASE IN USE OF GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS

Qualitative Data: Pre-Initiative Type of Reader Sample Attitude Survey and EQAO Student Questionnaire

- 45% of students indicated yes to: “I view myself as a good reader.”
- 12% of students indicated yes to: “like to read.”
- 27% of students indicated yes to: “I am a good writer.”
- 21% of students indicated yes to: “like to write.”

Qualitative Data: Post-Initiative Type of Reader Sample Attitude Survey and EQAO Student Questionnaire

- 50% of students indicated yes to: “I view myself as a good reader.”
- 40% of students indicated yes to: “like to read” and 50% indicated sometimes.
- 39% of students indicated yes to: “I am a good writer.” and 61% indicated sometimes.
- 56% of students indicated yes to: “like to write” and 38% indicated sometimes.
NOTE: 28% INCREASE in “LIKE TO READ”

Reading Logs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>% of Students with Fiction Entries</th>
<th>% of Students with Non-Fiction Entries</th>
<th>% of Students with Graphic Text Entries</th>
<th>% of Students With Favourable Rating</th>
<th>% of Students With UnFavourable Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>72</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2007</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2008</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Graphic texts did not become available until the second term in 2008

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Comments re: Qualitative Data
In terms of writing, our data shows that certainly as a result of our inquiry project, our boys were more familiar with Graphic Organizers and their function. Also, post-initiative, not only did more boys recognize Graphic Organizers as a strategy, but 62% focused on the social context of reading and writing to attach meaning, which was another goal related to our essential question. Both goals and strategies addressed: writing (graphic organizers) and reading (social interaction and Literature Circles).

In terms of reading, in the pre-initiative EQAO questionnaire, only 12% of the boys indicated that they “liked to read” compared with post-initiative when 40% indicated that they “liked to read” and 50% indicated sometimes. We hope that this data reflects that engaging reading resources are an option for boys, thereby fulfilling another goal related to our essential question. With respect to whether boys “like to write”, there is a 17% increase in “yes” responses.

We tracked Reading Logs over three years with struggling readers. There is a slight growth in number of non-fiction sources read and number of graphic novels read (which mostly includes non-fiction events). There is also an increase in the percentage of student-driven favorable ratings over the three years. The highest unfavorable rating is in Year 1, which undoubtedly shows the boys did not yet know that reading could be enjoyable when offered a choice in content and when relevant content is made readily available.

Quantitative Data: 2005-06 EQAO Results (Year 1 of Inquiry)
31% of boys at or above the provincial standard (Levels 3 and 4) in writing
44% of boys at or above the provincial standard (levels 3 and 4) in reading

Quantitative Data: 2006-07 Grade 7 Literacy Achievement Test (Year 2 of Inquiry)
0% of boys achieved at Level 3 or 4

Quantitative Data: 2007-08 Report Card English Marks (Year 3 of Inquiry)
54% of boys achieved at Level 3 or 4 (average for both terms)

Quantitative Data: 2007-08 Grade 9 Practice OSSLT
63% of boys achieved at Levels 3 and 4
(Compared with 35% of boys achieving at Levels 3 and 4 in writing for 2004-05 EQAO test and 53% of boys achieving at Level 3 in reading.)

Comments re: Quantitative Data
Obviously, students can write the EQAO test only one time in grade 6. However, we note and believe there is a noticeable increase in the per cent of students at Levels 3 and 4 in subsequent assessments as shown above. There is a dramatic increase in the per cent of boys achieving at Levels 3 and 4 in writing from 31% in grade 6 to 63% three years later in the Grade 9 Practice OSSLT. Yes, the two tests obviously differ; however, one cannot ignore the obvious increase in achievement and we hope the increase is partially due to skills and strategies learned while at Queen of Peace while participating in our Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

The most notable impact on us as educators is the feeling of accomplishment. It seemed as though when we met to collaborate and reflect, either formally or not, someone had a positive experience or idea to share. I feel that in a network of professionals, where student success is the number one goal, the positive energy spreads among all involved and has the power to transform practices, strategies, assessments and, more importantly, the achievement of our boys.

We grew together as teachers with the same goal in mind: “To see our boys progress and experience the joy and benefits that writing and reading achievement can bring.”

We have realized that it is important to try to find time to reflect, update, and collaborate with each other to validate our findings and ensure consistency. Collaborative marking led to greater understanding of our expectations and curriculum focus and a greater understanding of data, its purpose, and how it can shape both our instruction and assessment as a whole school. Instead of fearing data and viewing it as an “outside” force, we have come to realize that we as teachers have always tracked and collected data. Data should not be feared, rather invited in and displayed proudly.

Finally, our inquiry project has proven to us that indeed boys learn differently, in general, than do girls. And, as a result, it has been fulfilling to not only acknowledge these differences, but to address them in our instructional strategies, expectations, and assessments.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- Timeline Series Graphic Novels by Booth and Lundy
- Matt Christopher series of Biographies and Lemony Snicket Series Novels
- Gordon Korman series and Boldprint series: Booth, Green and Booth
- Hockey News, Popular Mechanics and Boys’ Life magazines
- The Hardy Boys series of Novels by Franklin W. Dixon

For professional development:
- Reading and Writing in the Middle Years by David Booth
- When Kids Can’t Read by Kylene Beers
- Creating the Dynamic Classroom by Schwartz and Pollishuke
- Graphic Novels in Detail by Booth and Lundy

Team Member Quote:
“As a male teacher, I realize the importance of not only encouraging my male students with respect to literacy, but modelling literacy on a daily basis. I will often complete the same writing assignment that my students are working on and share it with them. I can see that this puts the boys in my class at ease with reading and writing which are often perceived as something at which girls are better.”

“Miss, when is the new Hockey News coming in?” I love hearing this question from more of my boys each day!”

Administrator Quote:
“The Boys’ Literacy Project provided us with valuable resources, great professional dialogue, and a common vision and goal to improve student achievement in the area of literacy for our grades 6 to 8 boys. It’s rewarding and validating to see boys actually engaged and immersed in Literature.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
talk; reading logs; graphic texts; graphic organizers; Literature Circles
Final School Report: 2008

Boys' Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Regiopolis-Notre Dame Catholic High School
Grades 9 and 10 Applied English
Grade 10 Applied History
Grade 9 Applied Geography

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Peter Stelter: Social Sciences
Jim David: English
Ian Stuart: History/Administration
Kathy Cunningham: Administration
Wayne Hill: Principal

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
Essential Question:
To what extent does personal choice in reading material affect one’s literacy skills (reading, writing, and speaking)?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

1. Literacy resources need to be immediately accessible (in classroom libraries).
2. Resources need to be diverse (a variety of alternative resources).
3. Personal choice is essential to establishing and maintaining student engagement.
4. Shorter rather than longer reading pieces are best for analysis and study.
5. Visual representation of concepts/themes/events aids literacy development.
6. Make it Real. Provide concrete/hands-on opportunities so boys can apply their learning (reading) in a concrete way.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

1. Allowed us to open curriculum to a broader range of choice in reading materials, projects, and strategies; for example, we used “unorthodox” texts rather than “traditional” literary texts.
2. Our summative assessment practices focused more heavily on the Application and Communication pillars of assessment.
3. Our formative assessment focused more on the Knowledge, Thinking, and Communication pillars.
4. We used literacy technology (Kurzweil) to enhance student comprehension, knowledge, and break down the barriers of frustration.
5. WE enriched our previous assessment activities using immediately and newly available literacy resources.

Student Quote:
“I like this book because it is easy to understand and it is also something that I so far really enjoy reading.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

The boys at Regiopolis-Notre Dame come from a largely rural and ethnic culture. Their interests focus on sports, outdoor activities (hunting, fishing), and computer games. When we began, there was little interest in reading inside the classroom and little to no interest in reading outside of the classroom. Our team is comprised of history, geography, English, and special education teachers and our plan was to overcome some of the misconceptions and barriers that the boys at our school encounter with literacy. We decided that the best approach was to allow them the freedom to choose reading material that was of particular interest to them. This material included fiction, nonfiction, magazines, newspapers, and how-to-manuals that is outside the realm of “traditional” subject related reading.

We found that once students were given the freedom to discover their own reading interests, they read more enthusiastically and more frequently. As teachers, we discovered a renewed sense of mission and purpose inspired by the changes we made to our instructional approaches and the positive feedback from the students. Our students really enjoyed our informal discussions and the opportunities to share their reading experiences — this became widely apparent in the number of wildlife stories told by the students. Furthermore, sharing reading experiences, not only the content, along with the students' own experiences, provided a genuine connection to the reading.

Some of the challenges we met with were the apathy and indifference of the students toward reading and literacy based skills. Also, we found it a challenge to address the literacy needs of students while at the same time developing a thorough understanding of subject specific concepts and themes. Once we introduced personal choice in resource material as a supplement to the course we were able to minimize apathy. Students became more engaged, and we could teach literacy skills without compromising subject-specific concepts.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

In order to promote our work with personal choice and literacy, we will continue to:

a) build classroom libraries with additional works of fiction, nonfiction, magazines, and videos;

b) out-source ideas from our boys’ literacy inquiry group to other departments; and,

c) work with the teachers of the grade 9 Construction and Technology courses (which contain a high proportion of our target group) to help initiate and implement a literacy based component.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

The methods that gave us the most useful information included reading logs, tracking assignment completion rates, writing and presentation tasks, an established and routine weekly reading period, EQAO testing, reading surveys, and anecdotal observations of student behaviour before, during and after reading.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Qualitative Evidence:

1. Positive reception toward reading assignments.

2. Students were more enthusiastic to write about their reading projects, and from assignment to assignment, the quality and length of writing increased.

3. Student interest in literacy activities increased from beginning of course to end of course.

Quantitative Evidence:

1. Reading logs gathered over the term of the project show a marked increase in student engagement and interest.

2. Literacy surveys done at project start up and at project completion indicated an increase in general reading interest.

3. EQAO test scores: 2004 – Boys FTE 80% Successful   Girls FTE 93% Successful  
                            2006 – Boys FTE 88% Successful   Girls FTE 84% Successful  
                            2007 – Boys FTE 87% Successful   Girls FTE 88% Successful  
-- these test scores indicate that boys’ literacy skills rose from 2004 to 2007

4. Increased oral dialogue about reading material, student to student, and student to teacher.

5. Higher completion rates and more consistently completed assignments.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

As educators we have a better understanding of the importance of recognizing the different challenges that subject department teachers face when implementing literacy based components. Our team grew by sharing our individual experiences, successes, and challenges.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:

For professional development:

Team Member Quote:
“"The excitement I felt when introducing the new resources and the interest I felt when developing new lesson plan ideas was hopefully transmitted to my students."”

Administrator Quote:
“I am hopeful these new resources, as well as (and more importantly) the collaboration around how to implement them in the classroom, will create enthusiasm for literacy instruction around the entire school, in every department. The common language of literacy needs to spread out.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
personal choice, unorthodox texts, rural, reading logs, EQAO
Final School Report: 2008
Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Toronto District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Rene Gordon Elementary School — Grades 4/5

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Sarah Mercer
Ami Soloman
Rachel Ryerson

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.

teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca
Essential Question:
How do regular professional learning team meetings (PLTs) and the moderation of assessment — to learn more about effective reading strategies and to plan instruction — affect teacher learning and student reading outcomes?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- It is important to concentrate on targeted, focussed teaching stemming from students’ needs that arise through moderation of assessment.
- Teacher learning has significant impact on how to target students’ needs through focussed lessons.
- PLTs give opportunities for teacher talk and more consistent grading.
- The development of specific rubrics help teachers focus teaching and help students understand expectations.
- It is critical to ensure that rubrics created or used by teachers are carefully aligned with the curriculum expectations (taught/tested).

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

- We developed task specific rubrics.
- We focussed our teaching on specific reading strategies and skills.
- We developed a Balanced Literacy Block (3-part lesson).
- We selected appropriate and high-interest texts.
- We used common language and aligned our assessment practices.
- We used moderation of assessment to determine, for example, what a Level 3 “looks like”.

Student Quote:
“I really like it [using reading strategies] because I get a deep understanding of the text. I visualize, ask questions, make connections, and I go deeper in the text. It’s so cool!” — Grade 5 student
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

When our project started, our essential question focused solely on improving CASI scores by having the right materials. Most teacher comments were about resources and how to use resources. As we moved forward into year two, our essential question was modified to focus more on using the resources through targeted teaching lessons and we began to appreciate the importance of teacher talk in PLTs. Our conversations evolved to include discussions on moderation of assessment and targeted teaching strategies through the collection and analysis of data. In our third year, we embraced the importance of PLTs and the importance of teacher learning as it relates to boys’ reading achievement. Regular PLT meetings allowed us to discuss boys’ work and develop common plans and teaching strategies to help them achieve success.

Major Highlights and Successes:
(1) Our boys were excited about reading and selecting the new reading materials, enjoyed the opportunity for more talk-time with their peers about their reading, and demonstrated more focus and participation during lessons. We noticed them using common language, identifying their own strengths and weaknesses, supporting their opinions more frequently with evidence from the text, and making deeper, more meaningful connections and inferences.
(2) We saw growth in our boys' achievement in reading!
(3) As teachers, we valued that so much discussion took place in the PLTs and that our talk now extends outside of that designated meeting time and into impromptu discussions. We valued the opportunity to talk and share ideas about boys’ challenges and successes in their work.
(4) Our team truly enjoyed seeing the students use strategies from our targeted teaching in their independent reading more consistently.

Some Challenges:
(1) The transient student and teacher population. In addition, our school population decreased, leading to a decreased number of junior classes and, therefore, fewer junior teachers participating in the project.
(2) As we moved forward with our research, other needs came to light and, therefore, we needed to change our essential question each year and expand our focus. We realized that there was more to improving boys’ reading achievement than we initially anticipated. We recognized that providing engaging, targeted resources was only a starting point and that there was so much more that needed to be done and taken into account.

Finally, several things stayed the same throughout the three years, such as the teachers’ enthusiasm, the development of targeted teaching practices, and the use of our new materials.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

We would like to continue to use and make PLTs a priority to honour the importance of working in teams, moderating assessments together, and having consistency in evaluations across the junior grades. We also hope to continue to invite schools in the family to participate in professional discussions about the successes of targeted teaching and PLTs. We will continue to honour ways in which boys learn in our classrooms on a daily basis by using the knowledge we have gained throughout the project.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Data Sources:
We held PLTs every six weeks for 1 1/2 hours during school time. We developed and moderated assessments. To help track teacher learning, we took notes on topics, challenges, and what was working in our classes. We gathered scores on reading assessments given before and after targeted teaching lessons to demonstrate boys’ achievement in reading. We also gathered CASI and report card data each term as measures of reading achievement.

Description of Data:
(1) PLT assessments. As a team, we selected texts and wrote two high-order thinking questions for each. For example, for the poem *The Pocket Watch*, one question asked students to make a connection, “What would you have done in the same situation as the boy and why? Use evidence from the text and your own ideas.” For the picture book *Knuffle Bunny*, a question asked students to infer, “How do you think Trixie is feeling when she is unable to communicate to her Dad that the bunny is missing? Use evidence from the text and your own ideas to explain your thinking.” We then created rubrics to determine students’ levels of achievement for each assessment. Finally, we created tracking sheets to monitor student progress over time and established that any student achieving at Level 2 or below was at risk.

(2) CASI. CASI is a standard reading assessment created by Nelson Publishers. It is designed to diagnose students’ strengths and learning needs in reading comprehension. It has ten reading passages for each grade level (five fiction, five non-fiction). Students choose a passage and answer eight related questions, which target different components of reading comprehension: knowledge and understanding; critical thinking; inferring; conventions of written text; ability to explain, support and apply what has been read and to make connections among texts; personal experiences; and life situations.

(3) Report Card. This is summative collection of data evaluating students’ overall achievement in reading per term.

(4) Anecdotal PLT meeting notes. These are anecdotal notes taken during and after PLT meetings to establish what has been working well, what has not been working, and what instructional strategies teachers will try next. We created a template to record this information. A copy of the notes was given to each team member after each meeting. These notes were used to determine teacher learning throughout the year and addressed this element of our essential question.

Making Sense of Data:
(1) PLT assessments. Throughout the year, we looked at individual student data at every meeting to determine areas of need and next steps. We also compared most recent results to previous assessments. For the purposes of this report and considering the amount of data we had, we decided to look at the most significant term 1, term 2, and term 3 assessments only. Due to student turnover and high changes in student population, we decided to look at the percentage of boys at-risk for each term. Looking at percentages allowed us to see our class as a whole despite the turnover. We anticipated that the percentage of at-risk students would gradually decrease over the year with a goal that 75% of our students would be at Level 3 or above.

(2) CASI. We administered CASI once per term to determine areas of need, next steps, and student growth. Again, as the student population changed so much, we decided to look at the percentage of boys at-risk for each term. Over the school year, this approach allowed us to see our class as a whole, despite turnover. We anticipated that the percentage of at-risk students would gradually decrease over the year with a goal that 75% of our students would be at Level 3 or above. We also examined the data for individual boys who were in the junior classes for the entire year to see how many increased their overall score by one or more level. We anticipated that 75% of students would increase by one or more levels.

(3) Report Card. We triangulated our report card data with CASI and PLT assessments for reading achievement. We anticipated that at-risk students, as determined by CASI and PLT assessments, would receive a C or below on their report cards. We anticipated that the three sets of data would be in alignment.

(4) Anecdotal PLT meeting notes. We looked at our data across each meeting to determine teacher learning and teacher growth, modifying teaching strategies and assessments as determined by team member input. We anticipated teacher discussion would progress from discussions about resources to student needs. We also expected to see teacher growth in identifying student needs, and were pleased to recognize our own personal growth. Our notes are evidence of our growth as each time we discussed new teaching strategies applicable for certain students. These meetings were essential in aligning our teaching practices across classrooms.

The methods we found most revealing were the PLT assessments (teacher developed rubrics aligned with expectations) and the PLT meeting notes as they had the greatest impact on teacher learning and boys’ reading achievement.

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
**FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?**

**PLT Assessments**
Percentage of boys at risk term 1: 74%
Percentage of boys at risk term 2: 70%
Percentage of boys at risk term 3: 58%
Furthermore, 10 of the 13 boys (77%) who were here the entire year, increased by at least one level from term 1 to term 3.

**CASI**
Percentage of boys at risk term 1: 74%
Percentage of boys at risk term 2: 53%
Percentage of boys at risk term 3: 45%
Furthermore, 10 of the 13 boys (77%) who were here the entire year, increased by at least one level overall from term 1 to term 3, while 3 students remained at the same level.

**Report Card**
Percentage of boys at risk term 1: 50%
Percentage of boys at risk term 2: 59%
Term 3 unavailable as results are not posted until June.

**PLT Meeting Notes**
We were tracking individual students in meetings, focusing on boys and comparing their scores to previous assessments. From our notes, we noticed that teacher discussion developed throughout the year focusing less on actual resource materials and more on specific teaching strategies to address identified needs and overall reading comprehension. In the beginning we recorded information which included comments such as, "We need to find appropriate texts", "Let's use fiction and nonfiction texts", "It is time consuming to find appropriate texts" and "This text is better for modelling but this text is better for having students work in partners". In more recent meetings, teachers were saying things such as, "Developing rubrics and criteria with my class really had them focus and understand what was expected", "A group of my students are really struggling with giving evidence to support their ideas so I think I'm going to try giving them a graphic organizer to get started" and "I re-wrote samples of student reading responses and gave them to my class for them to determine the level based on our criteria. It was awesome! Students justified the levels they gave and demonstrated an understanding of the expectations and I think they get what they need to do next time to improve".

**Conclusions**
Our goal was to have 75% of students achieving level 3 or above (versus 26% in term 1). Our results were not as high as we had anticipated as in term 3 only 42% and 55% of boys were achieving level 3 and above on PLT assessments and CASI respectively. This is possibly due to the transient nature of our student population and teaching staff within individual years and across the 3 years of the project as many new students arrive mid-year. Also, many of the boys' baseline assessment levels were at a level 1 or below, which meant that they had further to go to no longer be designated at-risk (e.g., <1 to 3 versus 2 to 3). Despite the fact that the results were not as high as we had anticipated, the percentage of at-risk boys gradually decreased each term, demonstrating some progress in reading achievement. Looking solely at the percentage of boys who were here throughout the entire year, we exceeded our goal. The pattern in report card data differs from the PLT and CASI data, as the report card grades include students who are on IEPs who receive significant accommodations and/or modifications to their regular reading program that they did not receive when performing the PLT and CASI assessments. As a result their grades on the report card are higher than the marks on the PLT and CASI assessments. The most important thing is that most of these students were able to improve by at least one level on the PLT and CASI assessments over the course of the year.

We always expect students to improve throughout the course of the year, but we believe that through the use of targeted teaching, moderation of assessment and teacher learning through PLT meetings, their improvement is greater than it would have been without the implementation of these strategies.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Junior Boys At-Risk Data by Term

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of At-Risk Boys</th>
<th>Term 1</th>
<th>Term 2</th>
<th>Term 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PLT</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASI</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Mark</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

We have grown a lot over these three years. This project has allowed us to support teaching based on what we know about how boys learn.

Some of the teaching strategies we used to target boys were: (1) A greater element of choice in text selection, as well as mode of presentation to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding, (2) More frequent opportunities to work in groups with more personal accountability for their roles, and (3) Lots of talk time to help refine their ideas.

The collaboration of teachers increased in the third year of the project as we began to appreciate and value professional learning teams as a means of enhancing our own knowledge and understanding of how boys learn, how to present targeted lessons, and how to assess student learning.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- Power Magazines
- Novel series such as Silverwing, Sunwing, and Firewing by Kenneth Oppel
- The Chronicles of Narnia by C. S. Lewis
- Information books about the human body such as The Truth About Poop by Susan E. Goodman

For professional development:
- Strategies that Work by Stephanie Harvey
- When Kids Can’t Read, What Teachers Can Do by Kylene Beers

Team Member Quote:
“It’s so great to work together and to talk about what we are doing in our classrooms. I feel more confident in my teaching and assessment practices. I feel more connected and in line with my team and I feel that I am really making a difference.”
— Sarah, Grade 4/5 teacher

Administrator Quote:
“This has been an exciting process! The opportunity for teachers to discuss and problem solve together for a common purpose has affected the quality of daily conversations. It has created a fluid environment for positive change and has definitely impacted the way we use assessments, the quality of classroom instruction, and the success of our students, especially our boys.” — Principal

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
 moderation, PLTs, collaboration, success, teaching strategies
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Trillium Lakelands District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Riverside Public School – Grades 3-8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Colleen Meredith
Gail Terreberry
Susan Waddington
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Mary Lou Lefler
David Crawford

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.

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**Essential Question:**
Can a focus on differentiated instruction, combined with direct and focused teaching, effect positive change in boys’ attitudes toward, interest in, and achievement in reading and writing?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Use materials that appeal to boys’ interests and match their reading levels, and teach them how to find these materials.
- Allow boys to have input into the materials they read.
- Accept a variety of materials as literary forms (e.g., newspapers, pamphlets, and technology).
- Focus on features of non-fiction text.
- Allow and encourage the use of visual learning, assistive technology, scribing, and other tools to enhance learning and comprehension.
- Use APE(C) – answer, prove, explain. It is an effective tool for making connections.
- Use the GIST answer sandwich method – give a gist answer, prove it, and make a concluding statement.
- Use the Think Literacy graphic organizers for the development of reading skills.
- Use moderated marking, followed by identification of students’ areas of need and direct focused teaching to meet the needs.
- Use CASI questions to model strategies and effective answers.
- Have a high ratio of adults to students in classrooms. Involve SERTS, EA’s, literacy coaches, and classroom teachers so all can provide support for the students.
- Use student-directed learning and support creative or alternative thinking and ideas.
- Acknowledge and make use of all learning styles and teach reading with a multi-sensory approach.
- Use large literacy blocks that allow for inclusion of all components of a balanced literacy program.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**
Our inquiry project absolutely confirmed that boys learn differently and we need to teach differently in order to meet their needs and allow them to reach their full potential and experience success. The various changes to our instructional and assessment practices included:

- The use of higher-order thinking questions. We became increasingly adept at using Bloom’s Taxonomy questions and matrix.
- The use of implicit and explicit questioning.
- Regular PLC meetings to examine data from various assessments and discuss methods for meeting the needs of our students.
- An increased use of SMART Board technology, and computer assisted programs to teach and model instruction.
- Increased discussion about metacognition and an explicit focus on developing effective learning behaviours.
- The use of the “literacy coach delivery model” to facilitate direct and focused teaching of the high yield strategies for literacy comprehension.
- Increased use of differentiated instruction and modeling of effective teaching practices with support of the PIAT model.
- Increased use of multiple intelligence approaches.

**Student Quote:**
“I like to use the room for the great selection of books. There are comfortable chairs to sit in and you can read for a long time.” — Grade 3 Student

“It is quiet and the chairs are comfortable. I like reading *Sports Illustrated for Kids.*” — Grade 7 Student

[teachinginquiry@oise.utoronto.ca](mailto:teachinginquiry@oise.utoronto.ca) This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
WHAT IS OUR STORY?
Our original essential question was, “Can male role models effect positive changes in boys’ attitudes toward, interest in, and achievement in reading and writing?” We began by inviting males in the community to come into our school and share their experiences with literacy with students in grades 4, 5, and 6. A number of men with various backgrounds come to the school, some for single visits, and others on a more continuous basis. The experiences the men shared helped the students understand how they might use reading in their lives in the future, and also demonstrated that not all the men had been avid readers their entire lives. Another major component of our initial project was the creation of a reading space built exclusively for boys, by boys. A group of junior boys designed the room, painted it, furnished it, and determined what materials would be placed in it. The room was, and still is, a huge success — the boys spend time in the room reading a range of materials such as magazines, comic books, newspapers, non-fiction texts, novels, and graphic novels. The purchase of materials, the creation of the room, and the introduction of mentors into our classrooms all occurred in our first year.

As we moved into our second year — based on interest surveys completed by junior and intermediate students — we added more high interest resources to the book room. The use of the boys’ literacy room continued to grow — many younger students requested permission to spend time there. We increasingly experienced difficulty in finding male mentors who could regularly be involved with the students. While the male mentors served to jump start our boys’ literacy program, it was not a sustainable program. Therefore, we moved to using our intermediate students as reading buddies to our younger students and focused on modeling and teaching specific reading strategies. This was successful and helped us to move from external to internal support. As a team, we decided to move the motivation and interest into the classroom to help increase boys’ achievement in both reading and writing. We used a “literacy coach approach” that stressed direct and focused literacy strategies and used primarily non-fiction materials. We also increased the use of technology school-wide. We used SMART Boards for instructional purposes, participated in lap top board initiatives to provide students with regular use of technology in the classroom, and we trained students so they could regularly use assistive technology. Scores in CASI, interim reading tests, and EQAO all indicated success and proved that our “in-house” approach was effective and that it wasn’t necessary to search for help from outside the school building.

In our final year, we have maintained existing programs, added staff and student resources, intensified our focus on instructional strategies, and increased our use of differentiated instruction. Again, this year, we have seen growth in our boys’ reading and writing scores, as well as an increased willingness to participate in reading programs and activities in school.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?
Our plan is to continue to recognize and program for the boys’ unique literacy needs. A large number of staff have made adjustments to their instructional practices because of the progress we have made in this project. Our next step is to include and use these strategies across all grades. This will require more extensive PLCs so staff can share ideas with others, examine data, establish goals, and monitor progress. With entire divisions working together towards a common goal, we should be able to ensure that we will be providing programs that motivate and interest our boys.

As well, we will continue to promote the use of the boys’ literacy room. We hope to renew and add to the resources in the room, although funding is a major concern. We hope to involve the school council and the community to obtain corporate or private contributions. To encourage the use of the room and foster an understanding of the purpose of the program, we will showcase the room at beginning of each year. This will also allow us to reinforce the idea that it is essential that the boys are provided with choice in reading materials, as well as given texts that are at appropriate reading and interest levels.

We have seen such great success with the programs that have been implemented through this boys’ literacy initiative that it is our intention to continue to develop and enrich all aspects of the current work that is being done in our school.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“My son’s view of reading has changed since he started using the Boys’ Literacy Room. He is improving a lot with his reading. I hope he continues to make good use of the room, more frequently.” — Parent of Grades 3 and 5 students

“My son likes using the room and he says it is quiet. He reads a lot more to his brother and sister.” — Parent of Grade 3 student
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

We used a variety of data sources in this project. First, we administered an attitude survey to all junior classes to determine how boys and girls felt about reading and whether there were truly gender differences. An overwhelming majority of the boys (in comparison to the girls) stated that they did not enjoy reading or rarely read by choice. As well, we administered an interest inventory to determine the types of reading materials the boys viewed as interesting or would like to have available. We grouped suggestions that were similar and then tallied the numbers to determine the materials with the highest interest. It was these kinds of materials that we purchased for the boys.

As the project proceeded, the boys were asked to keep reading logs to determine the types of books they were reading, how often they visited the reading room, as well as other anecdotal comments about their reading. We used this data to determine the types of books that were actually being used by the boys, as well as to determine other resources that should be purchased. During the mentor visits, the boys were asked to keep anecdotal notes with questions for the presenters, feelings about the visit, and any other ideas they may had about future visits. These were collated and a summary of the ideas was written and shared with the team to prepare for future mentor visits. Throughout all of these experiences, several staff made anecdotal notes and observations. These were collected and grouped into categories so we could determine which experiences were creating successful opportunities for boys and whether there were actual changes in the boys’ attitudes and interests.

In the final phase of the project, we administered another questionnaire to our junior and intermediate students. We used this questionnaire to determine whether there was continued interest in the boys’ literacy room, whether they were still motivated to read the books in their classrooms and in the literacy room, and whether they felt there was a need to continue to develop materials and programs for the boys in the school.

With respect to monitoring achievement, our increased board-wide focus on classroom assessments such as CASI provided us with data for reading comprehension as it relates to the categories in the language curriculum Achievement Chart. This test allowed us to determine whether the use of non-fiction materials, the direct and focused teaching strategies that we used in the classroom, and the implementation of assistive technology were providing opportunities for our boys to achieve academic success.

As well, we used our EQAO scores to provide insight into the gender differences in performance as well as the specific areas of concern that needed to be addressed. We examined the results from EQAO tests and created plans for focused instruction, while ensuring that students had materials to use that would motivate and interest them.
**FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?**

Overall, our staff, students, and parents have indicated that many boys at Riverside have increased their motivation for and interest in reading. There is an increase in the boys’ participation in literacy activities within the school and the board and, over the past three years, the boys have increased their use of the library and reading room. Recently, a board-funded literacy initiative called “Battle of the Books” involved teams of students reading a number of novels over a two-month period and then competing to answer questions and identify quotes related to the texts read. Our junior and intermediate school winning teams, which advanced to the regional competition, were both teams that consisted entirely of male members. The willingness and eagerness to participate in these types of programs is due in part to the interest in reading that has been developed through the boys’ literacy project. The students who won the “Battle” competition are also boys who avidly spend time in the boys’ literacy room and make use of technology and a variety of high yield strategies in their classrooms. The data from the reading logs showed that the reading room was being used constantly throughout the day, usually by small groups of boys. The materials most frequently accessed were non-fiction materials, *The Guinness World Book of Records* and a wide variety of magazines. As well, there was a core group of students who reported significant interest in specific graphic novels.

During “Reading Buddy” periods, the older peers share their reading strategies and staff report that consistent language is being used throughout the grades. The results from the final questionnaire showed that a large majority of the boys in the various grades are still using the boys’ literacy room and continue to find the materials interesting and appropriate.

The school CASI data has shown an improvement in reading comprehension for most students over the past two years. Specifically, the boys have shown improvement in reading scores on CASI in many of the grades 5, 6, and 7 classes, many of whom have been significantly involved with the program for the past three years. Most of the grade 7 students received a Level 3 or 4 in the category of communication. Furthermore, the questions relating to features of non-fiction text were very well answered and demonstrated a high level of understanding. In the areas related to making connections and inferences, there were significant improvements for all grade 7 students. Therefore, through our direct and focused teaching and our increased awareness of boys’ learning styles and interests, we have been able to address the needs of the boys and clearly provide them with skills they need to be successful.

The results from EQAO testing this year have shown that our school junior scores overall were higher than the board scores. This year, there was significant growth in reading compared to last year. In the area of making connections, it was noted that 91% of our grade 6 students scored Level 3 or 4. As well, the grade 6 students increased their reading scores.

Our EQAO scores for the cohort of students who began the boys’ literacy initiative definitely show growth. In grade 3, 44% of the boys achieved Levels 3 or 4 in reading and, in grade 6, 81% achieved Levels 3 and 4. As well, in writing, the same cohort increased from 31% to 54%.

Further, over the past 3 years, the males writing the junior EQAO assessments have demonstrated steady growth in the areas of reading and writing. (See chart on the next page.)
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Detailed School Results

RESULTS FOR ALL STUDENTS OVER TIME BY GENDER AT THIS SCHOOL

Percentage of Students At or Above the Provincial Standard (Levels 3 and 4): Grade 6


READING

52  51  56  52  67  66

Female  Male

58  56  44  48  61

WRITING

59  56  54  75  74

Female  Male

55  53  53  54  54

MATHEMATICS

56  31  56  56  76

Female  Male

31  36  36  43  66

Total Number of Grade 6 Students


Female  Male  Female  Male  Female  Male  Female  Male  Female  Male

School  33  37  36  52  53  47  36  29  28  26

1. Variables such as student absences were not recorded.
2. If a student's test results were not available, the student was not included in the provincial report for the province.

September 16, 2001

This report has been released on EQAO's website and is for use by schools and school boards in teacher planning activities. It is not intended for public release.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

Participation in the Boys' Literacy Project forced us to focus on the differences in the way boys learn, their attitudes towards reading, their motivation to participate, and how we could address their needs. After carefully examining data and justifying “why a boys' literacy room?”, we have become committed to providing essential programming that effectively includes differentiated instruction and addresses learning styles based on gender.

Involvement in this project introduced us to the idea of action research and helped us to focus on a common goal that would meet the needs of many of our students. Creating the plan and working with a team of individuals across grades and divisions necessitated collaboration and team work. We learned to interpret data and to refine our goals based on data. The project forced us to examine our teaching practices and develop more focused instructional strategies that would create more equal learning opportunities for all students. We learned that explicit teaching fostered good comprehension skills, especially in the case of boys. We learned that the processes of reading needed to be directly taught, demonstrated, and modeled. We changed the types of materials we purchased for the reading room and used with our students in the classrooms. Although our focus was on boys' literacy, our improved teaching methods and the shift in our attitudes, as well as those of the students, led to growth for all students. The project allowed us to create a program that could be sustained for an extended length of time and it gave us time to work through a variety of concerns and problems that we encountered along the way. Two of the greatest impacts of the project were the opportunity that it provided to learn from our colleagues and the time it provided to share ideas and collaborate.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- Boldprint Magazines, Thomson and Nelson
- Bone (Graphic Novels series) by Jeff Smith
- Guys Write for Guys Read by Jon Scieszka

For professional development:
- Is That A Fact by Tony Stead
- A Guide to Effective Literacy Instruction, Ontario Ministry of Education
- Better Answers by Ardith David Cole

Team Member Quote:
“It’s totally rewarding for staff and students to know that the programming and materials in the classroom are reaching ALL the students. Those previously disengaged individuals are excited and interested in participating when they have input into what and how they will learn!”

Administrator Quote:
“Due to the initial project focus on boys' literacy, we now have an entire staff with an increased awareness and consideration of the unique needs of boys as learners and readers.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
boys' literacy room, non-fiction, peer mentoring, student ownership, conviction and commitment
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Rainy River District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Robert Moore School — Grade 4
Sturgeon Creek Alternative Program, Grades 6, 7, and 8
Donald Young School

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Kari-Lynn Beckett — Robert Moore School
Wilma Esselink — Donald Young School (Sturgeon Creek Alternative Program)
Essential Question:
While making it a habit, will positive role models affect boys' literacy?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Positive role models reading to young children improves children’s attitudes towards reading and how they see themselves as readers.
- When students themselves are acting as positive role models to younger Book Buddies, students’ view of themselves as readers and their oral reading fluency improves.
- Boys’ engagement in reading increases with appropriate reading materials that support varying levels of interest.
- Making reading a habit proved to be very beneficial for the boys in our schools.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

- Our inquiry project had a significant impact on our instructional and assessment practices.
- Our awareness of boys and male role models and our attempts to keep in mind boys' interests and learning styles, helped us to chose appropriate selections for: buddy reading, home role model reading, and guided reading selections.
- Boys’ interest in reading and writing activities increased in all subject areas as we learned to value the many types of printed word available.
- As a result of our research, we evaluated our assessment practices and adapted them to be shorter and more frequent.

Student Quote:
“Of course, I loved buddy reading, it was really fun!”

“My Dad read it to me! We liked it [Walter the Farting Dog]. Mom didn’t.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

We began our inquiry, “Make it a Habit with Positive Role Models”, as Kindergarten teachers in two different communities. We purchased fiction and non-fiction books on a wide range of topics. We encouraged the role models in the home (especially males) to read aloud to their kindergarten children. We organized a variety of newsletters and open house information evenings with the parents to familiarize them with the program. We monitored participation and collected comments on book selections and reading times. One of our greatest joys was hearing that the fathers, who themselves were reluctant readers, enjoyed reading with their children. Together with their children, they were getting hooked on reading! The fathers began to see the importance of their reader role!

In the second year, one of us went on maternity leave and the other was assigned half time to Kindergarten and half time to Reading Recovery. We expanded our inquiry project to include grade 1 students and we purchased new books based on the research and survey results from the previous year. New teachers became supporters of the project.

In the third year, the team member on maternity leave became a grade 4 teacher and the other was transferred to a combination of grades 6, 7, and 8 in a new community. Our essential question became “Make it a Habit as a Positive Role Model”. Our students became Buddy Readers to the primary students in our respective schools. We used the same picture books. Therefore, while the target group for the inquiry project remained the same, the role models changed from parents to older students. We arranged two occasions where our students were able to get together and read to each other.

The picture books we chose for the read alouds and discussions were well received by all students and role models. We were successful in engaging parents and children in positive reading. We were successful in engaging junior and intermediate students in non-threatening read alouds. All role models and students responded positively to the experiences.

Because the project changed, we were unable to follow our initial target group. However, we have data that indicates that the Buddy Reading was a positive influence on the junior and intermediate students.

We would like to acknowledge the support we received from the librarians, Senior Kindergarten and grade 1 teachers, and the principals of Robert Moore School, Donald Young School, and Sturgeon Creek Alternative School. Without their support and that of the RRDSB administration, this project would not have been such a positive experience. Thank-you.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

- We are sharing our results at our Junior and Intermediate Professional Learning Communities. We will be encouraging other teachers to get their classes involved in Buddy Reading and to have a variety of quality picture books in their classrooms for students to read and enjoy.

- We have been encouraged to share our experience across Rainy River District School Board at the Family of Schools Meeting next Fall.

- We hope to share our information with our Literacy Leads at their monthly Professional Learning Communities.

- In our own classrooms, we will continue to communicate the importance of reading role models.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“My son came home with The Hockey Sweater book. I could not imagine reading it to my son! His Dad came home, saw the book, and immediately picked it up. Dad and boy went to the bedroom and spent the next 30 minutes reading and sharing the book together! Both my boys and my husband enjoyed the variety of non-fiction books made available.” — SK Parent
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Our team collected a variety of data to support the conclusion that boys’ reading scores, fluency, attitudes, and self confidence as readers increased over time. All of the following assessments were conducted in both September and May to show the changes.

We collected CASI assessment scores to determine boys’ growth in reading. We used oral fluency passages with boys in both classrooms to determine their WCPM (word count per minute). We gave an oral fluency score out of 12 to determine each student’s level for: attention to meaning, smoothness, and pace. All boys completed reading attitude surveys.

In May, all boys completed year-end book buddy reading surveys to determine their level of self confidence when reading aloud to Book Buddies and peers in their classrooms. We found this to be very beneficial and rewarding. We found that interviewing each student individually was very beneficial. The boys’ comments and attitudes were very rewarding.

Overall CASI Increases from September to May

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Class Average and Month</th>
<th>CASI Average Score Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>September - 11.25</td>
<td>Increase - 4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May - 15.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>September- 14.50</td>
<td>Increase - 7.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May - 21.25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>September - 12.5</td>
<td>Increase - 8.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May - 20.83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>September- 15.00</td>
<td>Increase - 8.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May - 23.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reading Attitudes

All boys who agreed or strongly agreed to, “I am a good reader.” 69.5% In September and 82.7% in May
All boys who did not agree to, “I am a good reader”. 22% in September and 1% in May.

Word Count per Minute

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>WCPM Average per Class</th>
<th>Average WCPM Increase Per class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>September</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>33 WCPM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May</td>
<td>111.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>September</td>
<td>142.5</td>
<td>12 WCPM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May</td>
<td>154.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>September</td>
<td>120.1</td>
<td>48.6 WCPM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May</td>
<td>168.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>September</td>
<td>96.5</td>
<td>64.8 WCPM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May</td>
<td>161.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Beckett’s September Reading Results

We divided the WCPM by four so the data would fit into the scale of the other data. The 4.1, 4.2 refers to the individual grade 4 students. A few students moved in and out of our school system and some data is missing for those particular students. By recording our data this way, it is easier to compare the individual growth of our students. We then used the average classroom scores to compare grade specific data.

Esselink’s September Reading Results
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Beckett's May Reading Results

Esselink's May Reading Results

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

Over the past three years, we have had many opportunities to work together and create our own Professional Learning Community. Highlights that showcase the affect that this project has had on the boys in our classrooms and their literacy learning experiences include:

- reading experiences;
- positive community role models (fireman, police officer, principal, hockey and football players, Dads, Grandpas, etc.);
- making it a habit with Book Buddies on a weekly basis; and
- increasing the amount and selection of non-fiction and fiction resources and reading selections in our schools.

This has been an excellent experience for us and something that will continue in our years to come.

A grade 7 boy, with a WCPM lower than most students in the junior division took out the *Sports Illustrated* magazine, before we had chance to display it. This really underscored the importance of having the right reading materials available for the diverse interests of our students.

Using the books we purchased for the programs in all subjects also stirred student interest in different styles of books. Many of these books were then chosen as buddy reads or as independent reads later on.

It has been exciting to use picture books in the primary, junior, and intermediate divisions. Our “professional” eyes have been opened to the multiple ways these books can be used to meet curriculum expectations in all divisions including oral reading, character development, inferring, non-fiction text, patterning; voice, and joy of reading!

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- Bold Print books
- Wide variety of picture books for independent reading and buddy reading (fiction and non-fiction)

For professional development:
- *Me Read? No Way!* — Ontario Ministry of Education

Team Member Quote:
“This experience has been invaluable. The research and findings about boys and literacy have made an incredible impact on my teaching career and will be something that will guide my teaching for years to come.” — **Kari-Lynn Beckett**

“Many students’ fathers were reluctant participants, but when given the right books and the encouragement from their children and school, they became confident reading role models. These attitudes towards reading will affect their children long after this project is finished. Buddy Readers improved their reading skills by being role models.” — **W. Esselink**

Administrator Quote:
“Across the province, we have seen slight improvements in the provincial results for boys and literacy, but certainly they are still achieving much below the females. We noticed the same trend in our board; therefore, we initiated some programs to address it. We hosted a Boys and Literacy Camp and initiated a Pizza Box Home Reading program at some school sites. The ministry funds for this project have been a great support. I am amazed at the work the two inquiry team members have achieved despite personal and professional changes in their lives. They kept the project alive, exciting, and operational. I thank them for their continued hard work despite the challenges they faced, and the opportunity that was given to us by the ministry. With continued support, and increased knowledge of how children learn, I know that we can make a difference!”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
habit; role models; buddy reading; fluency; fun
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Toronto District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Roden Public School — Grades 4, 5, and 6

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Kathryn Montgomery
Karin Kurkcuyan
Michelle Kelly
Jennifer Heroux
Louise Granahan
Odette Revoredo
Terry Campbell
**Essential Question:**
Will use of electronic graphic organizers improve junior boys’ reading comprehension?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

Student attitudes towards reading improved with the use of high interest reading material and the use of graphic organizers that guided their reading. High interest, low-vocabulary reading material and 'self-directed' graphic organizers allowed all students, particularly boys and students with special needs, to participate in their regular classroom activities and access the regular curriculum for their grade. Students seemed to enjoy creating and using graphic organizers which helped them make sense of the world by organizing information into a sensible form.

Although students need to be encouraged to explore the software themselves and experiment with its uses, teacher direction is paramount as students need to learn how to access both the structural and conceptual features of the program. The visual nature of the electronic organizers does not appeal to all boys, so teachers need to be aware of students’ abilities and learning styles before assigning work using the software. For example, some students need to orally discuss the reading material before organizing their thinking and expressing their ideas on the computer and not all students understand intuitively how to select and organize their main ideas into graphically explicit form.

The open-ended nature of the activities allows for a very diverse range of students to demonstrate their understanding.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

The use of graphic organizers, particularly those created by the students themselves, allowed all students with a wide variety of learning styles and English language proficiency to participate. Therefore, instructional practices have included an increased use of graphic organizers for every curriculum area as a pre-reading and post-reading strategy. Higher-level thinking is encouraged and students are able to easily demonstrate their thinking without the cumbersome task of lengthy writing. Kidspiration software generally allowed for greater differentiation in both our instruction and our assessments.

We learned that we need to have classroom libraries that include a number of high interest books, magazines, comic books, graphic novels, and non-fiction material — as well as high quality literature — to engage students, especially boys, in reading.

**Student Quotes:**
“From my perspective it helped me get organized with my superhero story. It helped me because everything was in place. We had all the ideas down and that helped us write because it got us really organized.”
-- Grade 5 Student

“I think Kidspiration is a good program to use because when you write things down it’ll help you get organized for a story or a graph and also has a whole bunch of things to start you off, so it’s easier. You don’t have to write it all down”.
-- Grade 5 Student
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

We noticed in our EQAO scores that the boys were reading below their female counterparts and they appeared to have a less positive attitude towards reading in general. The CASI attitude survey as well as the comprehension assessment confirmed the same difficulties with our grades 4 and 5 boys.

Our plan was to improve the junior boys’ attitudes and comprehension with the use of Kidspiration and Inspiration electronic graphic organizer software. We believed that electronic graphic organizers would enable our students to circumvent the barriers of their limited English vocabulary, and in some cases learning disabilities, because graphic organizers allow for the visual representation of knowledge. We felt that students would then be able to generate and demonstrate higher-level thinking to help develop their reading comprehension.

The highlights of our endeavor included the provision of high interest books for the junior classrooms in our school. Both students and teachers provided very positive feedback regarding the new books. By using differentiated instruction and assessment and through the use of the books and software, we created an inclusive teaching environment in the library and classrooms.

We enjoyed the high level of engagement the boys demonstrated as they learned to use the software and worked on their various assignments. The variety and complexity of their final projects was always a pleasant surprise. Scheduling, as well as computer technological problems, were sometimes challenging and frustrating. Providing enough time for students to participate with a limited number of computers was also challenging. Sustaining the project over three years with the turnover of classroom teachers was at times difficult. However, the consistency of having the same small core group that included the librarian and literacy coach enabled us to see the project through to completion. We learned that the junior boys really enjoyed reading the non-fiction, high-action material. In particular, they seemed to gravitate towards the graphic novels and thoroughly enjoyed a unit we did on comic book heroes using the computer software. They responded positively, although some needed instruction on how to create their own graphic organizers, and they participated with enthusiasm.

The nature of Kidspiration software allows for scaffolding to enable students to use the existing library of graphic organizers to get them started. The boys enjoyed having a highly graphic and detailed finished product that they had created themselves to take home and show their parents.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

New questions that have emerged as a result of our inquiry project include, “How can we expand our focus to include reading comprehension as it applies to other curricular areas, such as Science and Social Studies?” We would like to improve integration of our language program with these other areas of the curriculum. We will continue to provide a wide variety of reading materials in the classroom and library that appeal to boys’ reading preferences, including graphic novels, non-fiction, and high-interest material. We will continue to make Kidspiration and Inspiration software available in the library and provide new teachers with information and some training on their use.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“What a fabulous and engaging way to help my child organize her thinking. She’s coming home excited to share her ideas.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

We used four major sources of data.

The first was grade 6 boys' EQAO scores. We made use of the final EQAO score rather than differentiate within the data to narrow down types of comprehension abilities. We looked at the detailed school report, which showed the Student Questionnaire results. We also looked at the grade 6 reading results by gender over the three year period. Changes were documented and shared with our staff.

Our second source of data was the CASI reading comprehension assessment. All students — girls and boys — participated in this assessment in grades 4, 5, and 6. We narrowed our focus by looking at specific questions within CASI, particularly those related to interests and attitudes. Within the attitude survey, we began by considering all 15 questions; however, after conducting the survey and looking at the data, it became evident that we needed to narrow our focus and we decided to look specifically at two critical questions. Those questions were question #2, “I like to talk about ideas and information after I have read something”, and question #12, “I read to learn about things that interest me.” These questions were most aligned with the focus of our inquiry.

Thirdly, we looked at report card data since it was readily available and we could focus specifically on reading achievement marks. We looked at the three reporting periods over the three year period, noting changes in the boys' language achievement. Due to the transient nature of our school population, we were unable to make comparisons with specific students, but instead looked at the overall language marks for the student population of boys.

Finally, we looked at student work samples, which gave us the most useful qualitative data to help answer our essential question. We created a rubric to assess student achievement. The rubric included students' ability to arrange concepts, use the graphics with purpose and understanding, use the word processing features within the software and, most importantly, demonstration high degrees of comprehension. We expanded the comprehension component of the rubric into three areas of achievement. The first was the expectation that students demonstrate understanding of text by summarizing important ideas. The second area was the expectation that students extend understanding of text by connecting ideas to their own knowledge, experiences, and insights. The third was that students identify the point of view presented in a text, citing supporting evidence from the text. This rubric served an instructional purpose, as we shared it with students and they were able to understand the criteria for achieving a Level 3 or Level 4 graphic organizer.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Our EQAO data indicates that there has been a dramatic increase in boys’ reading achievement scores since 2004-2005. At that time, only 27% of male students achieved at or above the provincial standard compared with 60% last year.

CASI attitude scores shown in the graph above indicate a general improvement with a slight dip for November 2007. We attribute this dip to an adjustment at the beginning of a school year, as well as to the limited amount of exposure students had by that point to the Kidspiration software.
Steady improvement is indicated for CASI attitude scores in the graph above.

Students used the following instructional rubric to improve their demonstration of comprehension.

**Reading Comprehension using Kidspiration Rubric**

**Arrangement of Concepts**
- Main concepts not identified. There are no sub concepts
- Main concept not clearly identified; sub concepts don’t consistently branch from main idea.
- Main concept easily identified; most of the concepts branch from main idea.
- Main concepts easily identified, sub concepts branch appropriately from main idea.

**Graphics**
- Graphics are not used at all or excessively
- Graphics used inappropriately and excessively; graphics poorly selected and don’t enhance the topic; some graphics are blurry and ill-placed
- Graphics used appropriately most of the time; most graphics selected enhance the topic, are of good quality, and are situated in logical places on the page
- Graphics used appropriately; greatly enhance the topic, and aid in comprehension. Graphics are clear, crisp, and well situated on the page

**Text**
- Font is distracting and difficult to read
- Font too small or too large to read easily
- Most text is easy to read. Most fonts used effectively
- Fonts are easy to read and appropriately sized. Different fonts are used effectively

**Comprehension**
- Demonstrates little understanding of a variety of texts by summarizing important details
- Extends understanding of text by connecting ideas to their own knowledge, experiences, and insights with limited effectiveness
- Identifies the point of view presented in a text, citing supporting evidence from the text with limited effectiveness
- Demonstrates inconsistent understanding of a variety of texts by summarizing important details
- Extends understanding of text by connecting ideas to their own knowledge, experiences, and insights with some effectiveness
- Identifies the point of view presented in a text, citing supporting evidence from the text with some effectiveness
- Demonstrates considerable understanding of a variety of texts by summarizing important details
- Extends understanding of text by connecting ideas to their own knowledge, experiences, and insights with considerable effectiveness
- Identifies the point of view presented in a text, citing supporting evidence from the text with considerable effectiveness
- Demonstrates thorough understanding of a variety of texts by summarizing important details
- Extends understanding of text by connecting ideas to their own knowledge, experiences, and insights with a high degree of effectiveness
- Identifies the point of view presented in a text, citing supporting evidence from the text with a high degree of effectiveness

FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

The inquiry experience over the three years enabled us to work together as a team towards a common goal. The partnering that took place in the library — providing training for teacher and students on the use of the Kidspiration and Inspiration software — provided a framework for future “partners in action” work. This encouraged us to align our instruction practices in the junior grades in many cases.

Although we began our inquiry by looking at mostly quantitative data, we learned over the course of the inquiry that the qualitative data provided more meaningful insights into the benefits of using our software and reading materials. Looking at students’ work samples and using a common rubric to assess them provided us an opportunity to practice teacher moderation and gain a deeper understanding of what constitutes student achievement, specifically in the area of reading comprehension. This approach had a direct impact on our classroom instruction as it made us more aware of the need for differentiated reading instruction and assessment as well as the importance of exposing boys to a variety of high interest reading materials.

Prior to our inquiry project, we assessed reading comprehension primarily through writing. However, we have found that with the use of Kidspiration, students and teachers have been able to demonstrate higher level thinking regardless of their writing ability. This is the nature of the graphic organizer software and it served this purpose very well.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- Boldprint 4-6
- Power magazine
- DK Readers
- A variety of graphic novels
- Kidspiration and Inspiration Software

For professional development:
- Partners in Action, Kidspiration/Inspiration in-service for teachers and students
- I See What You Mean and Show Me by Steve Moline
- Talk About Assessment by Damian Cooper

Team Member Quote:
“This inquiry has provided me with a very valuable tool to use in the future for all students with whom I work, because of its diverse nature. It has been enjoyable to use something that the kids genuinely like.”

Administrator Quote:
“What a great way to motivate children who really struggle with putting ideas on paper. I thoroughly enjoyed the children’s work and the boost to their self-esteem.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
- graphic organizer; Kidspiration; Inspiration; comprehension; reading attitudes
Final School Report: 2008
Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Toronto District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Rosethorn Junior School

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Linda Dumas
Brigitte Pugliese
Kathy Kowpak
Nazlee Badaloo
Gisela Klein
Todd McNamara
Miriam Litner
Pia Kallas-Harvey

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of...
**Essential Question:**
By increasing exposure to good literature through specific teaching strategies, can we increase the percentage of boys reading at grade level by June?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- A levelled library allowed us to expose boys to a variety of high interest books appropriate to their level.
- A levelled library allowed us to have an effective balanced literacy program.
- In our Professional Learning Communities, we created goals and developed effective strategies to improve literacy skills.
- Guided reading increased boys’ self-confidence; this, in turn, improved their attitudes toward reading.
- A direct focus on assessment tools and analysis of results gave us direction in our professional development to best meet the needs of our students. We utilized the expertise of our literacy coach, shared instructional and assessment strategies, and developed a data wall.
- We expanded our professional library.
- We learned that our boys responded well to the use of technology while learning to read; therefore, we will continue to update our computer programs. We applied for and received Special Equipment Amount Ministry computers for our neediest learners.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

- We discovered that we need to have a baseline assessment in reading to meet students’ needs. The use of a data wall provides a visual for teachers to follow student progression and flag students who need extra support if they are lagging.
- In our Professional Learning Communities, we have come to realize that it is important to consider the big ideas as we teach children to read and definitely at the primary level.
- Our balanced literacy programming has evolved and solidified. Teachers are focusing more on differentiated instruction to meet all the needs of all the students.
- Our development of a levelled library has been instrumental in supporting teachers in their programming.
- The incorporation of high interest texts — with a focus on non-fiction and graphic texts — has also been a great benefit.
- The staff works extremely well collaboratively.

**Student Quote:**
“I read more often than before. I am starting to like a lot more books.”

“Reading can be fun even if it does not have pictures.”
**WHAT IS OUR STORY?**

Rosethorn is a K-5 dual track school serving 350 students with a relatively homogeneous population. Our Mission Statement is to develop life long learners in a safe, nurturing, and inspirational environment while embracing diversity. Our school has a strong sense of community with impressive parental involvement. For our inquiry, we chose to track ten boys from one class in the English division over the three-year period. We chose the English division because we wanted to examine the impact of our teaching strategies on single language learners. Sixty per cent of the boys in this class are students with special needs and one third, due to learning needs, have transferred from the French Immersion program to the English division.

We needed to fine tune our original essential question. Overall, we wanted our boys to read more for enjoyment. We believed that when they read more, they would have greater success, which in turn would lead them to read more. One highlight of our project was that we created a leveled library in both English and French. We also developed a greater sense of community among staff and established classroom leveled book bins.

We chose to measure student growth on a continuum instead of looking at only test scores. We found that boys require high interest books and that it is important to make the books easily accessible in leveled classroom bins. We also found that it is important to use assessment data to drive instruction with a focus on meeting the needs of all students and to implement early interventions. We have enjoyed seeing our boys read more frequently. We have also enjoyed the increased opportunities to collegially discuss our teaching strategies and the successes of our boys.

It was a challenge to know where to begin, how to develop an essential question, and how to set aside time to focus on the project. In addition, we were concerned that the small sample size would not provide reliable results and that the DRA results would not be consistent from teacher to teacher and grade to grade.

We learned that our boys were reluctant to read because of a perceived inability to be successful readers. However, the boys exhibited pride in demonstrating their improved abilities to their peers and in taking teaching roles with their peers; e.g., with their reading buddies. We find that our boys are now more aware of their own reading abilities/levels as they choose their own reading materials.

Parents have continued to provide us with positive feedback and encourage us to continue to help boys succeed.

**WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?**

We want to achieve greater consistency in meeting as Professional Learning Communities. In our PLCs, we want to develop data walls for the French division for Alpha Jeune assessments and for CASI (Comprehension, Attitudes, Strategies and Interest – junior division) assessments to track all students.

We all need to participate in moderated marking activities so we are consistent in assessing students’ work.

We want to continue to replenish and bolster our classroom leveled library bins with high interest books in both French and English.

One of the strategies we used to encourage reading was a Literacy Train that celebrated the books the students read. We want to fine tune the Literacy Train and have a group of individuals take responsibility for running it.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“My son has improved 100% in his reading, especially this past year. He enjoyed reading and being read to over the past semester. His reading comprehension has improved and he does not fear reading assignments.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

DRA and CASI Results

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At or Above Grade Level

Reading Grades

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*FI = French Immersion
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Due to our small sample size, it was a challenge to report statistically significant data. However, while our data relates only to our target sample, we achieved significant gains in reading skills for all students at Rosethorn J.S.

All students showed significant improvement in DRA scores. That is, significant gains were made in the number of boys achieving at or above grade level. In June 2006, 25% of students were at or above grade level in reading. This number increased to 77% in June 2007.

All students maintained or showed significant gains in CASI scores from September 2007 (20% at or above grade level) to January 2008 (55% at or above grade level).

Some of our resources were channeled into the French Immersion classes for the purchase of high interest leveled books. Alpha Jeune assessment data indicates that 90% of the boys are at or above grade level. This group of boys was not part of the target sample group.

All students maintained or improved on their report card reading marks from December 2005 to March 2008. Six of the nine sampled demonstrated improvement in their reading scores. Three, who remained the same, have attention and /or learning difficulties.

A reading attitude survey indicated that more boys were reading for enjoyment. There was a positive shift in attitudes and practices. When boys’ reading abilities improved, they chose a wider variety of reading genres.

Boys are now much more aware of their reading abilities. These meta-cognitive skills have allowed boys to become more independent in choosing literature and in setting goals to improve their reading skills.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

This inquiry project encouraged us to have more open and frequent collaborative discussions about teaching strategies related to reading. We became more objective and consistent in our assessments and evaluations. With data, we were able to fine tune instructional practices such as: guided reading, read alouds, and independent reading. We now focus more on enhancing our balanced literacy program in all classrooms. The project has led us to collect more data with greater consistency.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- **Literacy Place for the Early Years** (Shared Reading BIG book, small books, CD and teacher's plan)
- **Bone** — Series of novels by Jeff Smith
- **Avatar** — Series of graphic comics
- **Nickelodeon Tokypop** — Cine-Manga R Books
- **The Time Warp Trio** — Series of novels by Jon Scieszka

For professional development:
- **Reading With Meaning: Teaching Comprehension in the Primary Grades** by Debbie Miller
- **Building Essential Literacy With Bookshop: A Research-Based Reading Program** by Carmel Crevola and Mark Vineis
- **Teaching Comprehension in Reading Grades K-2: Strategies for Helping Children Read With Ease, Confidence, and Understanding** by Gay Pinnell and Patricia Scharer

**Team Member Quote:**

“Whenever there are any interruptions that prevent our reading routines, several boys voice their disappointment and insist that the reading be rescheduled.”

**Administrator Quote:**

“It was a challenge to begin the project because we were unsure of how to begin this action research. By the end of the project, teachers became much more aware of how assessment data drives instruction. They are talking productively about strategies to support a variety of pupils in a balanced literacy program. And the best of all – more boys are reading, they are reading a greater variety of literature, and demonstrate pleasure in reading!”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
- Professional Learning Communities
- Literacy Train
- leveled library
- balanced literacy program
- assessment data
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Northwest Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Sacred Heart School – JK to Grade 8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Margot Saari – Principal (Plan Implementor)
Susan MacLellan – Vice Principal (Support)
Michelle George – JK Teacher (Support- Past Plan Implementor and so Advisor)

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
**Essential Question:** Will specific teaching of reading comprehension strategies improve male students’ attitudes towards reading for pleasure, increase comprehension abilities, and improve writing skills?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Funds are needed to support the position of a project leader to continue the intensity of the project.
- Short, focused time frames for collecting data are best to note specific improvements (e.g., Year One study), since student cohorts and human resources can significantly change.
- It is imperative that instructional leaders ensure that literacy projects are all aligned so that male achievement can be improved efficiently.
- Strategies that result in marked improved achievement for males also affect female students in the same classrooms in a positive way.
- We need to implement a common reading interest inventory for all grades at the beginning of the year as well as at the end of the year. This will help us understand where boys start to lose interest, where their reading interests lie, and how early intervention can positively affect how they read for the rest of their lives.
- **MOTIVATION is KEY!!**

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

- Common reading strategies improved our professional collaboration, discourse, and implementation as well as improved student achievement. A common language shared among staff and students was also essential.
- We found that oral language was directly linked purposeful talk, thinking aloud, organizing thoughts, and improves reading comprehension and eventually writing skills. What you can think, you can say and what you say, you can write.
- Reading strategies shared with the home improves students’ reading comprehension skills.
- Modelling the love of reading and giving students choice in texts engages them in learning and improves reading levels.
- The use of picture books for teaching comprehensive reading strategies appeals to boys of all ages.
- Modelling reading strategies outside of explicit reading instruction ensures that students will generalize the strategies to all interactions with text rather than just literature-based ones.
- Common assessment tools allow integrated, interdivisional approaches, allow the development of methods of analysis for refining approaches to evaluating standardized reading assessments (DRA, CASI, Star Reader), and allow multi grade analysis to capture trends across the grade levels as well as the school (COGNOS).
- Catholic PLCs and internal and external board sources have focused staff dialogue and classroom observations, improved the implementation of effective teaching strategies, and improved the analysis and relevance of assessment for learning.

**Student Quote:**
“I love having reading as a free choice!” — Grade 4 Student
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Year One
We chose grades 4, 5, and 7 and the Reading Resource Teacher (hired for the eight week project) guided them. They implemented eight, common reading strategies across the grades. We used the CASI reading comprehension assessment and attitude survey, the Accelerated Reading quizzes, and a writing sample to measure success.

Year Two
In Year Two, a half-time Reading Resource Teacher teamed up with our two literacy coaches and together they extended the project to all staff and added a ninth reading strategy to the original eight. We also included the parents in the project by using the same reading strategies in parent evening sessions.

Prior to the 2006-07 school year, junior teachers met to discuss the success they had with the reading strategies the previous year as well as boys’ interest in the texts that were introduced. Teachers agreed that it was important for all staff to build a consistent approach to teaching the strategies and to nurture boys’ interests by providing a variety of fiction and non-fiction texts as well as graphic novels, comic books, and instruction manuals. In addition, our new Balanced/Alternative Day schedule provided three, uninterrupted, one hundred minute blocks of literacy time.

Year Three
In Year Three, we did not have a Reading Resource Teacher, so our principal led the project. We posted the reading strategies on the shared drive for staff across the board to access. We invited parents to attend another Reading Strategies session in September 2007 and it was highly successful. The next week, we invited parents to attend a session on oral language strategies that was particularly relevant to improving literacy skills for male First Nation students. Our Oral Language program dovetailed with the NOEL OLA/SIP project in northwestern Ontario that was funded by the Ministry of Education and in which we were also involved. In January 2008, we hosted a Literacy Evening for parents that again highlighted the reading strategies.

In February, our principal invited Larry Swartz to speak to our staff and staff from another school in our board. The day combined the themes of boys’ literacy, oral language, drama, and the balanced literacy day. Staffs were elated about the resources Mr. Swartz suggested and the humorous manner in which he presented the material.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

- Ensure that there is a full-time Reading Resource Teacher (RRT) hired for the 2008-09 school year.
- Ensure the RRT works “at the elbow” with teachers to develop best practices to improve boys’ reading comprehension.
- Ensure that the Accelerated Reading program is used across the junior and senior grades.
- Use COGNOS to continue to track reading achievement for all students.
- Continue the reading strategies for Kindergarten and primary students flagged by WBTT, OLA, and DRA.
- Ensure our classrooms are rich learning environments stocked with a wide variety of fiction and non-fiction materials.
- Ensure that we use data to track student achievements (e.g., students achieving at Level 2 need to move to Level 3).

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“We’ll never forget you…not that you taught him (my son) to read, but that you got him to love reading!”

“You were my son’s favorite teacher and who would have thought historical fiction would be his favorite [reading choice]!”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?
DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Overall Facts
Of the original 71 students in the project in the spring of 2005-06, there are only 43 students remaining in grades 6 and 7 and the original grade 7 students have graduated from our school. In essence, 61% of the students originally in the project are still attending Sacred Heart School in Year Three of the project. Of the 43 remaining students, 26 are male.

EQAO Test Results
We were able to use EQAO test results for only the original grade 5 students who wrote the grade 6 EQAO assessment last spring and are now in grade 7.

The EQAO results for the reading assessment indicated that 50% of the grade 6 students were achieving at or above the provincial standard and, of those, 44% were male and 56% were female. For the EQAO writing assessment, 17% of males and 69% of females achieved at or above the provincial standard. For the EQAO mathematics assessment, 33% of the males and 56% of the females achieved at or above the provincial standard.

The gap between males and females was most narrow for the EQAO reading results. Since our focus throughout the project was reading, we consider these results good news. The reading results for this cohort of students were 8 percentage points higher than their results for reading in grade 3. In addition, many of our students originally achieving at Level 1 were achieving at Level 2. We now have 6% achieving at Level 1 and 88% achieving at Levels 2, 3, and 4.

COGNOS (Report Card Marks as of March 2008)
Our report card marks indicate that 63% of all our students are reading at Levels 3 or 4 and of these:
- Level 4 — 18% are male and 37% are female
- Level 3 — 33% are male and 38% are female
- Level 2 — 33% are male and 20% are female
- Level 1—total of 4% — which is good news as we worked to move all students achieving at Level 1 to Level 2

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FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Term 2 Reading Report Card Marks for Males in Grade 6 (Originally Grade 4 Students in the Project)

- 47% of the males are achieving at Levels 3 and 4 (41% at Level 3 and 6% at Level 4)
- 35% of the males are achieving at Level 2
- 18% of the males are achieving at Level 1
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Term 2 Reading Report Card Marks for Males in Grade 7 (Originally Grade 5 Students in the Project)
30% of the males are achieving at Levels 3 and 4 (12% at Level 4 and 18% at Level 3)
24% of the males are achieving at Level 2
18% of the males are achieving at Level 1
29% received an R on their report card, which is unacceptable.

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CASI Results
Over the last three CASI assessments (spring of 2007 though May 2008), seven of the original eight males in one of the grade 6 classes improved their scores.

The CASI Reading Attitude Survey was not used this year because teachers do not like it. Instead, we want to develop a school-wide survey (one for primary and one for junior/intermediate).
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

- We have learned to fine tune our teaching to meet the needs of our students through Catholic PLC’s, PD, and administrative instructional leadership.
- We have learned to use data to guide us. We have drilled down in our data to identify areas for improvement and next steps and to select instructional strategies to personalize learning for each child.
- We have learned to align provincial, board, and school projects to best utilize our time to improve the achievement of our students.
- We have learned that using common language across the grades enhances student improvement.
- We have learned that celebrating our successes through data informational sessions fuels the fires of determination.
- We have learned to critically analyze students’ levels of achievement and next steps for improvement and to make decisions about how we will help them improve.
- We have learned to share our learning with others in our board and those in coterminous boards and we have learned to value learning that is shared with us by other boards, nationally, and internationally.
- We have learned that new teachers need to be brought up to speed on initiatives and guided by a project leader.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- Dragon Naturally Speaking and Kurzweil
- RazKids software
- Reading A to Z (printable mini books)

For professional development:
- For the Love of Reading Conference in Toronto
- Chris Tovani – session on adolescent readers presented in Winnipeg
- Differentiated Instruction by Gayle Gregory (Dryden)

Team Member Quote:
“As the year progressed, I loved watching my ‘non-reading boys’ choose to read at free time rather than play a game!”

“As a parent, I felt that I didn’t have the tools or the resources to help my son begin to read, so at the end of the parent session that I led I was excited when a parent said to me, ‘I feel that I have what I need now to help my son with reading…I had no idea even where to start!’”

Administrator Quote:
“I loved to see how the numerous literacy projects (NOEL, CODE, OLA, SEF, Student Success, EQAO, Parental Involvement, Boys’ Literacy, and LANSA) could all be aligned to improve student achievement at Sacred Heart. Two years ago, we became serious about using the data efficiently and aligning instructional strategies across the school divisions through our Catholic PLC’s …now, as a staff, we talk the same language and are celebrating our improvements as a community!”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
reading; strategies; gender; choice; technology
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
San Lorenzo Ruiz Elementary School – K-Grade 8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Julie Debono
Jodi Derry
Joe Donofrio
Eva Faryniarz
Terry Frendo
Brenda McHeady
Mark McCallen
Tunde Szekeres
Melissa Taylor
Carol Tersigni
Essential Question: Will providing a broader range of choice in reading materials and frameworks for discussion significantly improve boys’ attitudes towards reading and their achievement in reading? A. what materials will boys more readily choose to read? B. How do we best facilitate choice? C. How do we assess boys’ reading skills and attitudes using a wider range of materials?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

Our data shows that in early primary grades there is little difference in boys’ and girls’ interests and abilities related to reading, but gaps begin to appear around grade 5 and widen if there is no sustained effort to differentiate strategies and materials.

Crucial factors in engaging boys in literacy activities and improving reading skills are: (1) a rich variety of reading materials, (2) frequent opportunities to talk about reading, and (3) consistent scaffolded instruction. We have learned how to structure opportunities for purposeful talk about books, either during informal discussion time after independent reading, or in more formal structures, such as literature circles or book clubs. We have learned the value of allowing students to lead us in their reading lessons by choosing what they read and the follow-up activities. We have also learned that boys do indeed enjoy the social aspects of reading discussions and engage in discussions more readily when there is less direct intervention from us. The quality of discussions about books is richer and more authentic when there is less teacher direction and held in a non-evaluative setting. This finding has implications for our assessment practices and highlights the value of teacher observation and both informal and formal reading conferences.

The strategies outlined in Me Read? No Way! are indeed successful. A broad choice of reading materials is essential to engage boys and keep them “hooked”. A greater awareness of boys’ developmental needs and learning styles has helped us shape our instructional practices (e.g., building in movement, drama and visual strategies and using methods other than pencil-and-paper for responses). It is important to pay attention to and ask opinions of the boys that do not like to read. Boys-only book clubs are successful for bringing reluctant boys into a “cool” group of readers. Inviting their opinions when choosing books for the classroom and library also creates enthusiasm for reading.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

Instructional Practice: Choice
- We purchased a wide variety of magazines, graphic novels, gender-specific novels, fiction and non-fiction materials.
- We set up travelling “book bins” for classroom independent reading.
- We used “Drop Everything and Read” and allowed students to bring in their own reading materials. We assigned no follow-up tasks other than time for discussion.
- We provided opportunities for students to choose their own books for book reports, provide input for class read-alouds, and choose assessment formats (e.g.; graphic organizers, essays, and oral reports).

Instructional Practice: Talk
- We adopted “literature circles”. Because boys are more comfortable talking in boys-only groups or when a discussion is not directed by the teacher, we conducted some boys-only literature circles.
- We used paired reading and “think-pair-share”.
- We were more aware of boys’ learning styles and built in movement breaks, snack time with reading time, comfy reading corners, and the use of drama for retelling.
- We held more book talks by teachers.
- We held invitational reading clubs, “The Book Disciples” who gather to read, share, or choose books for the library.

Assessment
- We broadened our assessments and incorporated book talks, literature circle activities, teacher-student conferences, and graphic organizers for students to demonstrate their comprehension of text.

Student Quote:
“I would make D.E.A.R. time longer. Also, it would be nice if we could have discussions about what we read after the time is over. I would want more time to read because when I’m at a good part we stop.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

San Lorenzo Ruiz is a multicultural school with approximately 650 students. There is strong parent involvement, with many volunteers in our classrooms and library and in our All Star Reading Program. While our EQAO reading scores are consistently at or above the board and provincial scores, there is a gender gap.

A major highlight of our project is that we gained a deeper understanding of how boys develop as readers. We invited guests such as the Mississauga Ice Dogs, St. Mike’s Majors Hockey Teams, and published male authors to read with our boys and be interesting male role models. A boys-only reading club, “The Book Disciples” met regularly and provided us with information about boys’ reading preferences and some explanations for the resistance of some boys to reading. The Book Disciples also helped select books for the library. We worked on activities to promote reading such as creating posters and bulletin boards. Our boys and staff have increasingly valued literacy during the course of the project and both are beginning to see the value of purposeful talk, especially in the Intermediate Division. With the project funds, we have increased our book collections and provided more breadth — now the materials better represent the interests of our male students.

Our team enjoyed the collaboration among teachers and students. We enjoyed the growing enthusiasm for reading among students and hearing teachers’ success stories related to the use of new strategies. Giving choice and ownership to students has been a challenging but rewarding shift for teachers. Most importantly, students and teachers made this journey together.

Our team enjoyed the professional learning and animated discussions as well as the sharing of ideas and materials. The level of engagement of the students has increased dramatically and this has had a meaningful impact on student learning. Strategies such as graphic organizers were more clearly defined and implemented more consistently across divisions. Our library and classroom materials now better reflect our students’ interests. It was a challenge to select strategies and have all staff adopt them consistently. Project goals required adaptation as team membership and school personnel changed. Finding time to meet continues to be a challenge, especially in a school-wide forum, and scheduling in a rotary structure imposes restrictions.

Boys were drawn to the topic areas that reflected their interests and responded enthusiastically to new and exciting reading materials and posters in the library. We discovered that when boys’ input is considered when choosing books, they are more inclined to read. Among the boys, reading is now perceived as more “cool”. Boys are increasingly annoyed when they must miss their library time and are not afraid to say so!

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

- We will continue to build and replenish our classroom book collections, particularly with “boy” reading materials.
- We will continue the whole school D.E.A.R. time valued by a large majority of our students and, in particular, address the desire of the older students to increase time for self-selected reading in the classroom.
- In partnership with the teacher librarian, we will continue to offer school-wide projects such as the Book Disciples and Forest of Reading Clubs in order that students may meet and engage in literacy activities.
- We will continue to expand our use of graphic organizers.
- We will continue to meet systemically in grade and divisional teams to engage in teacher moderation activities and collaborative planning in order to develop consistency. These discussions should include sharing successes, further study of professional articles and resources, as well as an examination of differentiated forms of assessment.
- As a Professional Learning Community, a natural next step would be to create peer coaching relationships to facilitate visits between colleagues for the purpose of observing each other “in action” while leading successful reading lessons.
- We will build on the home-school connection established in the primary grades and extend it into the junior and intermediate grades to help parents develop a better understanding of how to support their children’s growth as readers.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“In the past, boys focused mainly on non-fiction books. With the introduction of the Boy’s Literacy Program, there has been an increase in the reading of fiction books. I believe this is due to the subject/topic matter or story lines in boy’s literacy books, to which boys can better relate.”

WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Sources of Quantitative Data
We used EQAO scores and June report card reading marks as baseline data. Although we informally examined PM Benchmarks and CASI data at a divisional level, the maintenance of comparative statistics proved to be cumbersome and beyond the scope of this study.

Each June, we segregated library circulation data by gender. This data indicated the quantity of material being borrowed by boys and girls and also the types of materials. We used the circulation data to make purchasing decisions and to better understand the reading habits of our student population.

Sources of Qualitative Data
We gathered qualitative data from three sources:

- A pencil-paper survey administered to grades 1-8 students to determine how much they enjoyed D.E.A.R. (Drop Everything And Read – independent non-evaluated reading time) and what types of literature they enjoyed most. This data was analyzed by gender.

- An on-line survey using “Survey Monkey” administered to grades 3-8 students including questions related to their perceptions of themselves as readers, their enjoyment of reading both in and out of school, and the types of reading-related activities they most enjoyed.

- Informal observations conducted by teachers, which yielded valuable information and often initiated discussions among staff members about instructional strategies.

The qualitative sources of data were designed to give information about boys’ attitudes towards reading. Students’ written comments were particularly revealing.

Results: Report Card Reading Marks
Baseline 2004-05 and 2008 report card reading marks are shown in the graphs on the next page. Marks were collected in June for each year of the study except 2008 when we used the report card marks for March. Our observations are:

- There is a positive spike from grade 3 to grade 4 in every year of the study.

- There seems to be a trend downwards from grade 1 to grade 3 and again from grade 4 to grade 8 in boys’ levels of reading achievement.

- Year Two of the study (2005-06) presented an anomaly as boys appeared to do better than girls in grades 2 and 4; however, boys lagged behind girls significantly in grades 5, 6, and 7.

- There were many variables that changed from year to year such as teachers who changed grades and new curriculum that was implemented, thus making it difficult to draw definitive conclusions based on our data. Also, Extended French was added in grades 5, 6, and 7 increasing the number of girls in those grades, which meant that the samples of boys were smaller and percentages could be inflated. When compared with our EQAO data, however, the general trends appear to be consistent.

- Results indicate a need for teacher moderation activities for assessing and evaluating reading both at the grade and divisional levels.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Report Card Reading Marks

Results: EQAO Reading Scores
There was an increase in the number of boys that achieved at or above the provincial standard during the years of the project. However, there are still gaps between boys and girls. The boys scores are consistently lower with one exception for grade 3 in 2005-06. In the following graphs, the darker bars represent the girls, the lighter bars represent the boys.

Results: Library Circulation Data
We significantly increased the number of materials in our collection from 8,500 items to 14,237 items; an increase of 5,737 items or 67%. Of these new items, 1,484 or 26% were designated as “Boys’ Literacy” and were purchased using project funds. Our circulation records indicate a dramatic increase in the number of books borrowed from our library. In 2005-06, the total circulation was 20,975. As of May 2008, we have circulated 24,321 items, and we anticipate our final June total will be 27,023. Therefore, over the course of the project, there has been a 29% increase in the total number of items borrowed. Of the 24,321 items circulated so far this year, 4,822 have been from the boys’ literacy department. This is a loan rate of 20%. However, this department accounts for only 10.4% of our collection. This indicates a disproportionately higher rate of lending of these materials.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Circ. @ May 28</th>
<th>Circ. @ June 28</th>
<th>% increase</th>
<th>Overall % increase</th>
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<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td></td>
<td>20975</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td></td>
<td>23975</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>24321</td>
<td>27023 * (projected)</td>
<td>13%</td>
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To assess the impact of the inquiry project on class visitations to the library, we analyzed data by class and grade to track the number of books borrowed each year. We then paired this data with student data to determine the percentage of males and females in each class and the percentage of books borrowed by each gender. The results indicate three major findings: (1) 70% of classes increased the total number of books borrowed each year, (2) all classes increased the frequency of library visitations, and (3) the percentage of books borrowed by males is smaller than for females. Therefore, over the three years, the total number of books borrowed by boys has dramatically increased.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Results: Drop Everything And Read Surveys

- The vast majority of boys value D.E.A.R. time and want it to continue in the future.
- Adventures, jokes/comics, funny stories, and sports continued to be the most popular reading choices over the three years of the study.
- At junior and intermediate levels, graphic novels are popular.
- The school library became an increasingly frequent choice for students to source material for independent reading.

How Much Do you Enjoy D.E.A.R. Time?

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numbers shown in the table above are % of male students surveyed. Numbers display same group of students over the three-year period. Totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Results: On-Line Reading Survey

For the purposes of this report, the team chose to focus on two questions: 1) Do you like to read?, and 2) What kind of reader are you? The most significant finding from this survey was that there was a consistent increase in the number of students who reported that they enjoyed reading “Very Much” or “Quite a Lot” and a consistent decrease in the number of students who reported they liked reading “A Bit” or “Not at All”.

In response to the latter question, students rated themselves as an “Excellent”, “Very Good”, “Good”, “Not So Good”, or “Poor Reader”. 89.65% of boys rated themselves positively as “Good”, “Very Good” or “Excellent Readers” in 2006 and this increased to 92.96% in 2008.

Do You Like to Read? – Percentage of Boys by Grade Combined Categories

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>87.6</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>72.0</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>51.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>28.0</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>72.0</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>51.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>61.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>70.9</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>33.4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>76.4</td>
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</table>

What Kind of Reader Are You? – Percentage of Boys by Grade Combined Categories

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>93.0</td>
<td>92.4</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>88.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>82.9</td>
<td>98.5</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>87.8</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td>85.9</td>
<td>93.8</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>97.0</td>
<td>85.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

Our team concludes that, while we did not see a significant increase in boys’ achievement in reading, we did see a significant increase in positive attitudes towards reading and participation in reading activities. Our statistics show that this is the case consistently at the critical junior level. Our boys have significantly benefited from the types and quantity of books added to our collection.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

Our present team is comprised of classroom teachers, special education resource teachers, and the teacher librarian. Our team came together in response to the initial invitation and met monthly after school hours. We divided into subcommittees with different responsibilities: (1) data management, (2) resource purchase/management, and (3) role models and book clubs.

During our meetings, we looked at professional articles, shared successes, and problem-solved issues. We also discussed the progress of our inquiry project, examined input from the staff as a whole, and set short term S.M.A.R.T. goals. The goals helped us establish the short term foci for the divisions (e.g., a focus on one reading strategy per term). Members of the team then communicated with staff in their division in order to implement the goals. We shared the data we gathered with the whole staff periodically and teachers further refined the strategies which were the focus for the term. We also surveyed staff regularly about their perceptions of the inquiry project and their professional development needs.

One benefit of the project was the increased cooperation of staff around a school-wide focus. We learned to analyze data and use it for planning. Staff embraced the concept and demonstrated a willingness to re-examine and change practices. The inquiry project prompted changes in our thinking and teaching strategies. The staff articulated the need for continued collaborative planning. We were able to come together as a community of learners and agree on strategies that helped students.

Examining EQAO, PM Benchmark and CASI results at divisional meetings helped us define the instructional strategies on which to focus. Our annual student surveys of D.E.A.R. time and our on-line reading survey yielded important information about our students’ reading habits and preferences, and teachers incorporated more self-selected reading time into their programs.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- Graphic fiction and non-fiction, especially *Bone* and *Captain Underpants*
- Magazines
- Sports oriented books

For professional development:
- *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels
- *Strategies that Work: Teaching Comprehension to Enhance Understanding* by A. and Harvey Goudvis
- *Creating a Literacy Environment for Boys* by Christopher M. Spence
- *Boys and Literacy, Practical Strategies for Librarians, Teachers and Parents* by E. Knowles and M. Smith

Team Member Quote:
- “Talk less and listen more.”
- “I varied my instruction so there was always choice and I followed the boys’ lead more often.”
- “Library (book exchange) is enjoyed by the students just as much as my gym class. Students can’t wait for library and when they miss a class they are extremely disappointed.”
- “The project emphasized the importance of differentiated instruction, not just for exceptional students, but for all students.”

Administrator Quote:
- “If you want to know what students are really thinking and learning, ask them. It was wonderful to watch the enthusiasm of our boys grow as they were offered the chance to shop for books and then to see their choices arriving in the library. The other day, I watched an intermediate class working in groups to create mind-maps as a response to the novels they had chosen to read. The level of engagement and quality of discussion was phenomenal. I have learned a great deal from teachers who were willing to try new approaches and take these risks.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
- Book Disciples
- choice
- talk
- graphic novels
- on-line survey
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Huron Superior Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Sister Mary Clare Catholic School – JK-Grade 8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Linda Pozzebon – Principal
Maria Esposito – Superintendent assigned

Teacher Team
Keith Coletti
Melissa Guzzo-Magli

Report written by Linda Pozzebon
Essential Question: Can all students achieve higher literacy standards given sufficient time and support from teachers, the principal, parents, and community and by choosing appropriate resources for boys?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Boys’ should make their own reading choices. Often, they do not know what they like, but through observation, the teacher can learn about their interests and help them choose books that match and extend their interests and reading levels.

- Boys like short stories and they like to write “short and to the point” pieces in writing class. When a teacher expands the writing piece together with the boy, there is more success.

- Boys like someone to read to them and, with role models, this influences their attitudes. Read alouds and shared reading fit with a balanced literacy program. Our boys were surprised to see others, such as male guests, engaged in reading. The more we talked about reading, the more they thought reading was cool.

- Boys like to read to buddies because it appeals to their need for social interaction.

- Boys enjoy field trips. The experience and active learning motivate discussion and writing.

- Boys like a personal place to read alone or with other boys. Our boys’ corner was highly successful.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

After using and analysing the Learning Styles Inventory, we realized there is no ideal teaching style for boys. They need as many different types of teaching methods as possible and they become interested in reading and sharing a book when the teachers, principal, and others around them are passionate. Discussions around the actions of characters in books, the eventual development of morality standards according to our Christian

Student Quote:
“The best time in my day is when I can just hang out with my reading buddy in Senior Kindergarten. We slouch down and just stare at the paintings and share our ideas. I really care that he’s having fun and, because it is school, he’s learning to read too.” – Grade 7 student
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

We built pride in our school as a learning place that had wonderful new books and a special private place for boys to hang out and read. Our Boys’ Literacy Corner had wall paintings professionally painted by a local male artist. Only the boys gave input on the content of the paintings -- a flowing historical presentation of heros including Noah’s Ark, Pirates of the Caribbean, and astronauts. We fundraised for a leather couch and we displayed books on the walls. We set up shelving and computers for further research and writing. The books were chosen by the boys and teachers. Visitors such as the Director, our superintendent, parents, and supply teachers loved this corner. Pride was evident!

Skimming books and sharing ideas on pictures and titles was part of the literacy block. Working with students in lower grades as reading buddies in the boys’ reading corner encouraged younger students to understand that reading was important and cool.

Eventually we fundraised and developed a girls’ corner. The fever was on!

Monies were allotted for field trips to complement book studies. For example, we visited the Sault Locks and when the class returned they found books about explorers, coureur de bois, native life, map drawing, etc. History and science came alive! The students talked, shared, researched, and wrote. Differentiation in learning and teaching was a term not fully understood, but fully alive and vibrant. Experiential learning for boys was key! We held PLC’s to talk about the field trips and how we could use that experience as a teaching tool. We developed a focus.

We gradually developed and more fully implemented Literacy Blocks in the Primary Division and then later in other grades. The boys’ literacy initiative gave us a reason to use Carmel Crevola’s Breakthrough Model. We

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

We followed the Breakthrough Model to move our boys’ literacy initiative ahead and used the excellent supports and guides developed by the OISE/UT research team. We were growing – all of this was very new to us and we needed to absorb a lot of information very rapidly. We needed time to work through the support materials. The amount of guidance in each booklet is enough for two years of professional development.

EQAO data and daily observations set the stage – students’ scores were very low. It was our moral imperative to target and focus on what we needed to do to improve student achievement. It was obvious we needed resources. We purchased high-interest books for the boys’ corner.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“Our School Council supported the Boys’ Literacy Project, but also extended it for the girls and parents. With the PRO grants, we held a Carousel Night and gave a free book to each child who attended. This encouraged the parents to attend our information night and reinforced the need to support the improvement of boys’ reading. It was well received and we were proud of our efforts and success.” – School Council Member
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

In the first year – fall 2005 – we used grade 3 EQAO results in reading and writing to develop our proposal.

In the first phase of our project – spring 2006 – we added DRA scores and daily observations to the data we planned to collect. We implemented Data Walls and compared the data to report card marks. All of this data provided information for much dialogue. This was our first attempt in making Data Walls and at using assessment to drive instruction and PLC’s.

The CODE Project led to deeper dialogue as we learned to target individual students and through the “triangulation of data” (as described in the April 2006 Work Plan Support Booklet), the team discussed what data we would collect and how we would use it.

In our Transitions Meeting, we reflected on our next steps for the fall and we decided to develop a Balanced Literacy Schedule using the new resources we had purchased through the boys’ literacy initiative. This was a good process but a very slow one.

Our first step was Read Alouds. We invited our Curriculum Co-ordinator and a book company representative to help us with purchasing books and we brainstormed how to use good titles for good modelling and reflection.

It was a significant transition for teachers to learn how to use the newly purchased resources, focus on specific skills, and then collect data through sources other rather than just paper-and-pencil tasks.

We needed to change our teaching strategies to accommodate individual time for each student so we could record observations of them attempting tasks, working in a group, and how our differentiated instruction and assessment strategies provided a new learning environment. Concurrently, we needed to develop students’ social skills to ensure engaged learners were reaching their potential.

Due to changes in the membership of our inquiry team, we experienced difficulties gathering authentic and valid data. However, through the constant leadership of our principal, a new team reviewed what assessment methods we would use to collect both qualitative and quantitative data.

Because our board had chosen Differentiated Instruction as part of our Strategic Plan, we decided to explore D.I. more deeply for our boys’ literacy project. We worked together with the CODE Project in PLC’s.

For professional development and leadership growth, we did special presentations each term. These included “Music as a teaching strategy”, “Strategies for success”, “Help make it a habit”, and a video to the Canadian Conference of Trustee Convention. Our second year – 2006-07 – was very busy and included new ideas and hard work. We compared report card marks with DRA scores. There was little change in students’ scores,
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Our project in 2007-08 wavered. Many of our team members, our principal, and original superintendent were transferred.

Ownership of the original boys' literacy inquiry project was transferred to the CODEProject, which is now in its second year and under the leadership of the Learning Resource Teacher.

Report card marks and DRA and CASI scores show that more Teacher Moderation through PLC’s with critical friends or divisional meetings would be a good next step.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

The project was very supportive for professional growth and permitted full implementation of capacity building.

The principal who was in our school when this project began, has taken the lead in her new school and has connected the OFIP Project and Student Success with the needs of students as they relate to gender. This teacher inquiry initiative and the Work Plan Support Booklets are excellent and are now being applied. We are purchasing new resources, especially for boys, and the research is being discussed in PLC’s.

For the teachers who were transferred, their leadership skills are recognized and are being utilized.

This Boys’ Literacy Inquiry Project was an excellent, well-planned, and focussed process for professional growth, which in turn ultimately benefited achievement and success for all students. We need to be proud and joyful of our work as we motivated the “love of reading” in our students! Please visit our website

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- Boldprint, Thomson/Nelson
- Power Magazine/Power Zone, Thomson/Nelson

For professional development:
- Me Read? No Way! – Ontario Ministry of Education (every teacher needs to read it!)

Team Member Quote:
The Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project provided me a foundation of research and excellent strategies, which I could apply to my planning and daily work for children of all ages. Having great books is one thing, but using them well to motivate, is another challenge. I appreciate all of the work put into this project.”

Administrator Quote:
“The Boys’ Literacy Project prepared me as an instructional leader to support effective professional growth for staff members. This project, one of the first in the province, led the way for implementation of the Breakthrough Model to my current role in the School Effectiveness Self-Assessment Framework. The research

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
boys’ library corner; short stories; field trips; boys’ pride and joy; boys take ownership
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
District School Board of Niagara

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Smith Public School — JK/SK and Grade 1

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Kara Baranoski
Hilary Abbey
**Essential Question:** Could making a connection with home, specifically with early primary (JK/SK/Grade 1) parents, increase student achievement? Consequently with this connection and forum could we decrease the gap between boys and girls literacy achievements in their early years?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

The students in this project were ages 3, 4, 5, and 6. Many changes were more related to the parent-teacher connection.

Parents new to the education system are unaware of academic expectations for their children

Parents have no formal knowledge of learning and curriculum expectations and, in some cases, are unaware that a program for Kindergarten even exists.

Parents learn through open communication with teachers that they have a role

The parent becomes part of a teaching team and becomes eager and hungry to learn to continue the education process when the child leaves class for the day and brings it into the home.

Boys are capable of achieving the same level of success as girls, but the key is to know and understand the individual child

All children can learn, but girls are much quicker to conform to the teacher’s style of teaching and then succeed. Boys, on the other hand, remain non-conformists and it is then the teacher’s job to find the style that suits the boy. This can only be successfully implemented with the help of parents who have ample insight and information about the child as an individual.

Communication with parents can be directly linked to student achievement

When a relationship is established and maintained between the parent and teacher and when changes occur in the student’s achievement levels, it is easy to determine the reason through an open dialogue. The problem can be immediately corrected so the student can maintain their academic achievement level.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

- Differentiated instruction became my way of teaching.
- I was not teaching a class, but individuals with a variety of interests.
- I was teaching children to push themselves because I believed they could achieve; that is, instead of setting a standard and hoping they would achieve it though teaching lesson upon lesson.
- I stopped teaching skills in isolation.
- I used all kinds of text and print to teach phonetic skills, reading is everywhere.
- I used the higher-order reading star strategies to help the students make connections to the text I was reading. The text that they were reading was basic skill but the students were able to draw conclusions about what they were reading and they more readily and confidently tackled new text and challenged themselves to read.
- My teaching day became not a language block followed by a math block, etc., but a day of 300 minutes of language blended into every other area of study.
- I worked with parents to teach them to be partners in their child’s education, but also to be leaders in the community to get other parents involved in our school.
- Assessing the children’s progress remained similar because of board guidelines, but I was no longer driven by that tool.

**Student Quote:**

“Mrs. B., can we read a story out of the math bin today, the funny one where all the numbers get lost ‘cause I have a good connection today!” – E., a Grade 1 Student

**Note:** E. began school in JK unable to hold a pencil or write his name. He would not pick up a book and had difficulty sitting in circle lessons for any length of time (two minutes maximum). His parents participated immediately after my Kindergarten presentations the year he started. They worked extensively with E. and me and we created a real team approach to his education. His term 3 grade 1 assessment indicates that he is reading at level 24; that is, early grade 3 level.

[teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca](mailto:teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca)

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

2005-2006: Preparation
Once my proposal was accepted, I felt the weight of the responsibility, but also an excitement. I set a plan in action for the class of 2006-2007. I wanted to start fresh because I needed to reach the parents before they sent their children to JK and I wanted to use the SK class as a comparison base. That spring, I invited the JK and SK parents for the next year’s students into the school and provided them with information about what was to come. I also gave them a summer project to help them prepare their JK or SK child for school. I learned that the parents were not unwilling to work with their children; however, they just weren’t sure what they should be doing. How were they to engage their children? I also brought in the speech pathologist to speak to the parents and give them a chance to look at how their children were developing in relation to speech and language milestones. I gave parents resources and tools and, in some cases, connected them with the agencies needed to help them move their children to the developmental level needed for school in September.

2006-2007: Kindergarten
In September, the children arrived with their parents, both eager to begin. We had few tears and struggles because the children were prepared. Over the summer, school had been a topic of discussion, and the children were excited to start. I found it was easier to work with the children. While there was a gap between boys and girls, it was far less. More students arrived with early literacy foundations than had in the past. That October, I had a company come in called Baby Bookworms. They took the parents (83% of them) through a series of four workshops that taught them how to teach their children to read and why it was their responsibility. The company’s premise was “learn to read, love to read”. The parents were so enthused. Their motivation to be partners in education was astounding. The parent volunteer program soared, my communication with parents doubled, and my newsletters changed to include literacy links. The parents were empowered.

2007-2008: Grade 1
There was no distinct gender gap in reading. There was, however, still a gender gap in writing. We gave parents the tools to help their boys achieve. I focused less on conventions and presentation and more on recording thoughts on paper or giving tangible presentations. All year, the boys impressed me with their enthusiasm and excitement for writing. In fact, the whole class was focused on reading and writing. They would choose to read and write when they had spare moments and were motivated to read and write at home. Grade 1 is a big adjustment for students, so I did not give assignments, book bags, or any type of homework. I continued to include literacy links in my newsletters, but nothing official. The parents and children kept up their work at home. Reading and writing together — what a commitment to learning and growing academically.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?
An important question I have for my school and board is, “What are we going to do to maintain these relationships”? We have found in the past that parent involvement drops off as children get older. How do educators drive the point home that parents are key in their children’s education, just as much, if not more, as they enter the higher grades?

We created such excitement and motivation among the parents to be involved, to volunteer, be receptive to learning, and be vulnerable enough to talk about their children’s academic, social, and emotional development. We do not want to lose this energy and fabulous ongoing dialogue.

At the board level, I hope to share what we have created and make it known that parental involvement is the key to student success. I am looking forward to receiving the EQAO results for this class of students and the classes to follow, to show the board that this relationship is paramount. As each new group of JK students comes into our school, parents will receive in-service regarding literacy and their role in educating their children. Our school will continue to develop relationships and create a learning community. Our school culture has changed and I hope it will be a model in how to create partnerships with parents and be devoted to all learners, especially boys who might not be reached because we didn’t know how.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“I have so enjoyed learning how to learn through my son’s eyes. The education system is nothing like I remember it when I was a kid. I love all the evenings I have spent in workshops. I really hope it can continue now that my son is moving into an older grade.” — Grade 1 parent
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Quantitative Data
In working with young children and parents, it was difficult to gather large amounts of quantitative data. However, I am sure that as the students progress through the grades and write more standardized tests, we will see the results from our inquiry project.

We collected the following quantitative data:
- Parent attendance for all in-services and guest speakers.
- PM Benchmark (reading assessment tool) scores for three years for SK and Grade 1 students.
- SESAT (Stanford Early School Achievement Test) scores for students in Grade 1 for 2005-06, 2006-07 and for this year’s students for 2007-08 (the students who were the subjects for this inquiry).

Qualitative Data
We collected the following qualitative data:
- Formal interviews with the parents.
- Workshop with follow-up discussions, questionnaires, and focus groups.
- Guest speakers with follow-up questionnaires and discussions.
- Regular reports and presentations given to the Smith School staff.
- What students have said, in particular the boys, has been interesting. When working with these boys, I have learned to listen and watch what they do. I have asked questions about why they have chosen particular books for self-selected reading and learned what their motivation is to learn to read. Each student has presented differently. Each boy has learned to read in different ways and for different reasons. The only consistency is that boys learn according to their own agenda and not mine.
- Every conversation I have had with parents and students for the past three years has guided my inquiry. I have grown as a teacher and shared what I have learned with my colleagues.

All that I have learned from this inquiry project through gathering information from every area possible — parents, students, teachers, and scores from a standardized test and reading assessments — has shown that:

“YES, making a connection with JK/SK/Grade 1 parents increases student achievement and decreases the gap between boys and girls literacy achievements in the early years.”

Making this connection means more than just reaching out and providing the workshops and information. It requires a level of trust between parents and teachers. It requires vulnerability for both parents and teachers to accept and value each other’s role and to share misunderstandings, fears, and personal information. The communication must be open and there must be a give and take relationship.

It must be understood that boys are not intrinsically motivated to please their teachers and will not learn for the teachers’ sake as girls generally will. It requires that the teacher learn about the child (boy and girl) from the parent. Knowing the child will help the teacher program and motivate. It will also help the parent learn what the expectation is of their child at school and how they can carry on the excitement for learning with their son or daughter at home.

Finally, it is important to know that all children learn differently and should be given the opportunity — both at home and at school — to read a variety of materials and learn to find themselves and how their interests can translate into learning to read and write.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW

- Parents are willing to get involved and be a part of an education team. For example, after working with just the boys for a few weeks, I began to notice that many of them read with staccato fluency and poor expression. I wondered if it was due to the fact that most of the boys were read to by female voices. We naturally have a light higher tone to our voices. We recruited some fathers and grandfathers to make a commitment to read to a group of boys on a regular basis (at least once a week). Because of the parent connections, it was easy for us to gather a group of men. We provided them with picture books that have been placed on a boy’s reading list. The program is working fabulously. The boys are engaged, they are fascinated with the topics and books that are being read to them, and they are also changing how they read. I see greater fluency and more expression used when reading aloud. The boys look forward to the Boys’ Reading Groups and it has become a highlight of each week.

Workshops and Guest Speakers

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- Boys learn when they are interested and can do so on their own terms. I brought in a variety of resources that captivated the interests of all the children. I watched as they excitedly read while they should have been engaged in different activities. One particular guided reading lesson comprised a group of boys and I chose a non-fiction piece on the Inukshuk. Instead of asking them to write about what they had read or answer comprehension questions when they had finished, I requested that the boys go to the math manipulatives and build an Inukshuk. They took their books and reread and built. They are still writing and reading about Inukshuks two months later. They have become very proficient in procedural writing and love to read “How To” manuals and books.

- The combination of parent involvement and material that appeals to the interests of boys does result in improved scores. In addition, more boys move from Kindergarten and grade 1 through the primary grades no longer lagging behind the girls.

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
“I am so very pleased to witness the growth of all students as a result of this inquiry project. I mention all students because the efforts of this project have had a spill-over effect to all grade levels and both genders. Clearly, the PM Benchmark data is indicating that students in JK-Grade 1 are achieving greater success in reading. Our boys are equally as strong as our girls in early reading development and in some cases stronger. I have been astounded by the involvement of parents this year. Parent information sessions have inspired large turnouts and every day we have a wide variety of volunteer involvement on many different levels. We have just as many Dads as we do Moms spending time at our school working with children. This is exciting! Our school is committed to maintaining the connections that we have made with parents. I have grown on a professional level as a result of this project and have also been impacted as a parent myself.” — Administrator
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

Environment, cultural norms, and motivation are all that has changed at Smith School. The focus of our project — our students in grade 1 — have reaped the greatest benefit. Our school is a welcoming environment. Language is everywhere. Messages about the importance of literacy are everywhere. The parents are partners in their children’s education. The parents have a voice that is always heard and their children are not simply boys, girls, or students like all the others, but individuals who learn differently. The children are celebrated for who they are.

We work as a team — child, parent, and teacher — to create the best possible learning environment. The students’ achievements are celebrated on a daily basis. Celebrations at school are communicated and shared with the home and vice versa. Communication and teamwork have been the keys to every student accomplishment in the last three years.

I have been deeply changed as a teacher. Now, I never generalize about a child. I never profess to know how to educate the students better than their parents. I spend much of my non-teaching time during the school day communicating with parents via phone, e-mail, agenda, newsletter, or personal contact. I use parent volunteers more effectively in my class because I have a greater rapport with the parents and we have the same understandings about expectations and goals for the students in the class. I look to my colleagues for understandings about their students and we have created regular team meeting where we discuss children as individuals and what we are doing to help all achieve and succeed. I encourage learning in all ways and take the students off in different directions so they can grow and learn. I am more a guide for the students than a teacher as they are directing how far they can go with the challenges they undertake according to their personal and intrinsic motivations. Language and literacy is happening throughout the day and the children are aware that reading is a part of everything we do — not just a block of time in the morning.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Non-fiction books have more appeal than fiction books, but this is a sweeping generalization. There is not one particular fit for all boys. I learned that “knowing the child” helps when selecting the book that is the best fit for motivation and literacy level. Among our boys, the World Book Student Discovery Encyclopedia (non-fiction) was just as great as a Bill Pete book (fiction). How one sells the book plays a big part in what boys will pick up to read.

For professional development:
Even Hockey Players Read: Boys and Literacy by David Booth, Story Works! by David Booth and Bob Barton, Why Gender Matters by Leonard Sax, Learning for All by Lawrence W. Lezotte, Read to Me: Raising Kids Who Love to Read by Bernice E. Cullinan, Me to We by Craig Kielburger and Marc Kielburger, Raising Your Spirited by Chil, Mary Sheedy Kurcinka, A Guide to Differentiated Instruction: Reading with Meaning by Debbie Miller

Team Member Quote:
"The way we learn is more important than what we learn. When you are teaching a child to read it has to be built into their lives so that literacy is all encompassing. What they read doesn’t really matter. It is developing experiences and relationships with texts of all forms. Every question has an answer and it is just out there somewhere waiting to be found and, in finding these answers, we learn about ourselves. More importantly, it reaffirms what we already think we know.”

Administrator Quote:
“Having our children wake up each and every morning eager and excited to learning is my goal as an educator and as an administrator. It is my priority to ensure a safe, comfortable learning environment for every student. This project has reinforced for me the critical part that a parent plays in their child’s learning. By inviting parents into our school and giving them a purpose, our school has become an environment where everyone belongs. This sense of belonging has contributed to our children feeling safe and secure. This foundation has proven to be critical in order for the best learning to occur.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
literacy; parent involvement; school culture; student success; differentiated instruction
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Durham District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Southwood Park Public School – Grades 2, 5, and 8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Risa Sanchez-- Education Officer, K-6 Programs
Denise Pidutti – Principal (originally Adrienne Lewis)
Anna Farquhar-- Teacher Librarian
Greta Davis -- K-6 Literacy/Numeracy Facilitator
Jill Foster-- English Facilitator
Jewell Ellis -- Literacy Coach (originally Rosemarie Gillespie)
Jennifer McCauley -- Grades 5 and 6 Teacher (originally Kelly Piggot)
Debbie Truscott-- Grades 1 and 2 Teacher
**Essential Question:** How can we help students, especially boys, redefine and expand their definition of reading so they understand that reading isn’t limited to traditional text and encourage them to apply critical thinking skills to all forms of text?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

Teachers are much more aware of boys' reading preferences through the use of interest inventories, conferences, etc. They are not assuming what students want to read. As a result, they are making adjustments to the resources used for instructional purposes. For example, a wider variety of non-fiction material is now used. Whole class novel studies are no longer the norm. Instead, late primary and junior teachers are implementing literature circles and allowing students to choose books based on interest. Intermediate teachers are providing opportunities for students to select their own texts and are integrating a more cross-curricular approach to their programming as they implement differentiated instructional approaches. Teachers are also beginning to examine programming decisions and assessment tools with an eye to providing a learning environment that is more appealing to various learning styles.

Independent reading time has increased. Appropriate time is provided to allow for reading and meaningful discussion of books rather than requiring a consistent written response to texts. Students are provided with a greater variety of reading materials and are allowed to self select. This shift away from written responses after reading has reinforced a scaffolded approach to the explicit teaching of comprehension strategies. By division and by grade, there is increased evidence of consistent terminology and vocabulary being used by both students and teachers to explain their thinking and apply critical literacy skills. Anchor charts and active word walls are

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

During monthly PLC's, teachers have been analyzing reading assessment data and targeting instruction based on needs. This has led teachers in both the primary and junior divisions to begin to focus on collaboratively creating a plan for the explicit instruction of various text forms as outlined in the Ontario Language Curriculum document. This division-wide initiative will be implemented by the teachers to maximize learning opportunities, avoid unnecessary repetition, and to redefine students’ definition of reading beyond traditional texts. Students will continue to be purposefully exposed to a wider variety of literary, graphic, and informational texts.
WHAT IS OUR STORY?
Southwood Park is a dual track school. When the journey began three years ago, many issues regarding literacy were uncovered. First, the students did not have access to a wide variety of rich, interesting literacy materials for reading. There was little evidence of uninterrupted literacy blocks or planning for the gradual release of responsibility (scaffolding). Teachers had not had the opportunity to participate in job-embedded/school-based professional learning nor did they have collaborative planning time across the dual tracks.

The initial year was spent providing student resources and professional learning time to grades 2, 5, and 7 teachers. Time was provided for these teachers to learn more about boys as readers and writers through the use of professional texts and high quality literacy resources were purchased to support guided and independent reading. Junior and intermediate students also selected high interest literature at a local bookstore for their classroom libraries. Organized library visits were provided for the primary students. The library and book trips were very successful. The students were highly interested in this portion of the project and truly enjoyed the opportunity to select texts of personal interest. Teachers felt the preparation for the trips (i.e., teaching genres, having students discuss and record reading preferences, exploring new forms of non-fiction text, and learning how to choose texts and navigate the school library) was very valuable. On reflection, many teachers indicated they would have also included the explicit teaching of different genres and more work to expand students’ understandings of texts.

End-of-year data and directions were shared with continuing and new staff to reaffirm the commitment to improving boys’ literacy. During the first term of Year 2, teachers focused on consistent implementation of diagnostic assessments (i.e., running records and CASI). The literacy coach continued to work with staff to set goals for sustainability but, due to lack of funding, no further time was available for professional dialogue.

During the third year, this school was provided with monthly divisional PLC’s. All primary and junior staff were

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?
Teachers at Southwood Park will collaborate and implement their divisional plans for the explicit instruction of various text forms and comprehension strategies as outlined in the Ontario Language Curriculum document. The teachers are dedicated to maximizing learning opportunities, avoiding unnecessary repetition, and redefining students’ definition of reading beyond traditional texts. As well, the teachers would like to develop common assessment tools across the divisions to consolidate a common understanding of student achievement and create exemplars of student work. The K-6 facilitator and the literacy coach will continue to support teachers for both tracks in the analysis of running records and CASI data, in addition to sharing relevant professional resources to support the school’s goals for literacy and numeracy. Intermediate teachers will continue to receive support as
Parent/Guardian Quote:
“What a great idea to let the kids choose the books for the classroom library! I had to buy the book my son chose so he could have his own copy at home.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?
DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Quantitative Data: EQAO and CASI

Our quantitative data indicates that the reading achievement gender gap has closed at Southwood Park P. S.

In 2004-05, 46% of grade 3 boys achieved Levels 3 and 4 for the EQAO reading assessment. In 2006-07, the grade 2 students who were in the project wrote the grade 3 EQAO assessment and 58% of the boys achieved Levels 3 and 4 in reading compared with 40% of the girls. The boys scores increased tremendously!

This same cohort of students who was in grade 4 in 2007-08 was tested using CASI. Overall, the CASI scores for grade 4 boys increased by an average score of 1.6, while girls scores increased by 1.08. These results support the conclusion that the school was successful at improving boys’ reading achievement.

In 2004-05, EQAO reading scores for grade 6 indicated that 39% of boys achieved at Levels 3 and 4 compared to 59% of girls. In 2006-07, the grade 5 students who were in the project wrote the grade 6 EQAO assessment and 62% of boys achieved Levels 3 and 4 compared with 52% of girls. This is a significant increase in boys’ achievement in reading.

This same cohort of students who was in grade 7 in 2007-08 was tested using CASI. The CASI scores indicated similar and minimal increases for boys and girls (0.62 and 0.63 respectively).

Qualitative Data

Part of the original focus of the project was on students’ attitudes towards reading. This information was provided by board-created, project-driven attitude surveys. The survey data did not show any significant changes over time in students’ enjoyment of reading; therefore, the decision was made to focus on students’ perceptions of themselves as readers. The evidence indicated some changes in reading attitudes. In 2005, the survey results indicated that 63% of boys identified themselves as good readers -- this increased to 73% by June 2006.

The 2006-07 EQAO attitude survey also indicated that 73% of grade 6 boys rated themselves as good readers.

More interestingly, 30% of boys were unsure of their reading abilities initially but, by June 2006, only 19% felt unsure. In addition, 41% of boys initially felt their friends thought reading was fun and, in 2006, 54% felt the same way. Similarly, 48% of boys initially said their friends thought reading was not fun and this decreased to 31% in 2006.

Another interesting result was that initially 47% of boys agreed or strongly agreed that reading took them a long time; whereas, in June 2006, 29% felt this way. In the initial survey, 64% of boys stated that when they enjoy a particular book they try to find more books by the same author and, in 2006, 83% of boys felt this way. Once boys found an author they liked, it appears they learned that selecting another book by the same author was a useful strategy.

Qualitative data was also collected using videotaped interviews with several boys from each classroom. A general trend emerged; that is, most of the boys stated they would like to have more time to read in class. These
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

This year, the board has provided time for monthly Professional Learning Community meetings for English and French Immersion primary and junior division teachers. With the support of a Literacy Coach, teachers have been able to focus on using a wider variety of reading materials to enhance literacy programming.

During the first year of the project, for the first time, the Family Literacy Night at Southwood Park showcased student work focusing on responses to the classroom library selection of books from trade stores and libraries. The displays of student work, although varied in form and presentation, were samples on display boards. Over the past three years, Family Literacy Night has evolved into a true celebration of authentic excellent student work in reading, writing, and media as teachers have enthusiastically learned how to provide real-life learning experiences in literacy.

During the PLC’s, teachers are collaborating in ways to engage boys in literacy by providing greater choice in student responses to texts. During table talk, teachers are bringing a variety of artifacts that demonstrate increased student engagement in meeting the requirements for high quality work in reading and writing. Teachers describe their focus on high interest activities such as: Director’s Cut, game boards, brochures, power point presentations, and other computer technology strategies to engage students in tasks that are purposeful and meaningful in their lives. Teachers report that students are so excited about their learning that they are creating media type presentations that go beyond the classroom.

Using EQAO school results and EQAO student sample excerpts, primary and junior division teachers focussed on the explicit teaching of the features of non-continuous text as well as inferential thinking. Teachers in the junior division were able to locate and use more samples of non-continuous text in their classrooms as a result of the resources that were purchased in the original year of the project. Intermediate teachers focussed on CASI data to drive their programming decisions. They planned, implemented, and reflected on specific literacy lessons, based on CASI data, and incorporated differentiated strategies both in instruction (scaffolding) and ways for students to demonstrate their learning through assignments.

Involvement in the boys’ literacy project has been beneficial for all stakeholders. The students are aware of their learning goals regarding literacy. They are able to articulate their thinking using consistent vocabulary to discuss the comprehension strategies used to unlock the deeper meaning of text and are much more aware of the author’s purpose and also, the writer’s craft. During collegial and professional PLC’s, teachers share both high quality student samples of written work as well as present and discuss strategies to improve the achievement of their students who remain at risk. Parents are more aware of their children’s literacy learning because of the school’s literacy nights.

More time is needed to investigate and incorporate high yield strategies for teaching and for learning about reading and writing strategies to continue to improve boys’ and girls’ literacy skills in a purposeful and precise way. Teachers will continue to gather diagnostic data, look at the results, analyze the needs of their students, and plan strategic literacy experiences for students at Southwood Park P.S. during PLC’s and division meetings during the 2008-09 school year.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

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WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

At the beginning of the project, the focus was on increasing the scope and breadth of in-school resources that would interest boys, as well as introducing project teachers to research-based high yield instructional strategies. Over time, the focus shifted to supporting the implementation of high yield instructional strategies on a regular basis.

As educators, we recognized that the real challenge was in sustaining the project through regular school evolutions, such as changes in administration, staffing, and the student population. The following are observations made by the team:

- It is important to have high quality professional texts available and time provided during the working day for teacher book clubs so the lessons and information within those texts can be explored and shared.
- It is important to provide students with opportunities to select their own reading materials from easily accessed and ample classroom resources. The school budget has increasingly provided for more student resources, as requested by teachers.
- It is important to provide teachers with sufficient time to meet with colleagues and discuss student achievement in order to plan further instruction and uncover students’ learning needs, resource needs, and personal growth needs.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Boldprint
Momentum

For professional development:
Is That A Fact and Reality Checks by Tony Stead
Even Hockey Players Read by David Booth
Start Where They Are: Differentiating for Success with the Young Adolescent by Karen Hume

Team Member Quote:

“It is a pleasure to see the enthusiasm and commitment among the staff after being involved in the project for three years. The positive examples of student work shared at the PLC’s and the level of professional dialogue is

Administrator Quote:

“I am so grateful for the facilitator and coaching support for my staff. There have been such great improvements in closing the gender gap.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
literature circles; choice; differentiated instruction; independent reading time; discussion
Final School Report: 2008
Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Toronto Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
St. Alphonsus Catholic School — Kindergarten to Grade 8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Jean McGillis — Principal
Stephanie Fernandes — Grades 1/2 Balance Literacy Representative
Ruth Sousa — Grade 2 Balanced Literacy Representative
Jill Snow — Grade 4 teacher
Mary Feliciani — Arrowsmith (Special Education)
Reyanne Achong — Grades 7/8 teacher
Maria Novo — Grades 6/7 teacher
Michelle Mellow — Grades 7/8 teacher
Mary Kowalsky — Kindergarten teacher

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
**Essential Question:** Listen To My Story! Boys Demonstrate Higher-Level Thinking Skills.

### WHAT DID WE LEARN?

The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- We found that using topics and types of materials of interest to boys (e.g.; non-fiction, graphic novels, computers, cars, how-to books, science fiction, sports, and biographies) led to more engagement and improved the quality and quantity of their work as reflected in daily assignments and report card marks.

- Boys were more engaged when given a choice of topics to write about, a choice of books to read, or a choice of activities to perform.

- Boys enjoyed active learning experiences such as oral participation, group activities, and literature circles.

- Boys were more successful when given a structured approach for completing assignments (e.g., APE — answer, prove, extend).

- Boys in the intermediate grades were less willing to take part in oral presentations.

- Step-by-step instructions with chunking of the material yields better results for boys achieving at Level 2.

### HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

- We recognized that certain kinds of teaching strategies were more appealing to boys. These included modelling, pairing, sharing, investigation, active learning, bancho, gallery walking, and repetition.

- Boys were more successful when their assignments were broken down into chunks and when they were given step-by-step instructions.

- Boys produced a better quality of work when they were involved in self-assessment and peer-assessment and when they were given a general rubric to evaluate assignments.

- Boys responded favourably to the introduction of plays, presentations (e.g., Drama in the Classroom, Scientist in Schools), and guest speakers (e.g., on career day) and were able to write about them and demonstrate a higher quality of work and longer reports.

**Student Quote:**

“The activity I enjoyed doing the best this year was watching and reviewing the movie *Paula's Secret* because I like to watch movies and discuss them. I found it to be the easiest activity this year and I enjoyed it.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

It became quite clear early on in our inquiry project that boys were more engaged in their learning when they were given topics of interest to them and when assignments were designed to be more active. The challenge was to discover exactly what types of materials appealed to boys and to build experiences that would encourage them to become fully involved in their learning process while, at the same time, covering the curriculum. It was exciting to see positive results from the changes we made in how we delivered the curriculum.

Our team enjoyed coming together in our divisional meetings (primary, junior, and intermediate) to focus on how we could connect with boys to encourage them to participate in their classroom experiences in a meaningful manner. It was the first time that we shifted our focus to determine how we could change our teaching strategies and assessment tools to specifically meet the needs of our boys.

Our most notable success was the almost immediate improvement in the boys’ attention when we consciously chose reading materials that appealed to boys and when we altered our instructional strategies and assessment tools to a more activity-based model that better reflected the boys’ learning styles.

Our challenge continues to be the engagement of boys who come to school with considerable “baggage” and show minimal interest in becoming involved in their learning experiences at school.

We asked the students for their input on the types of books and activities they enjoyed and we used this information to design lessons that would have maximum appeal for the boys. The boys responded very favorably with improved attitudes toward completing quality assignments.

We are making a conscious effort to incorporate what we know about how boys learn into how we deliver the curriculum. We have changed the types of classroom resources we order, how we deliver the units (i.e., more activity based), and how we carry out assessments and evaluations.

We are continuing to see some advancement in our boys’ learning, but unfortunately, we are still struggling with some who are not responding to this initiative.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

- We will continue to deliver programs in a manner that appeals to boys’ interests and encourage them to take an active part in their learning. Our findings demonstrate that boys respond favourably to activity-based learning with movement in the classroom, either group work with discussions or experienced-based learning.

- Our initial essential question was based on a very general approach to boys’ literacy; however, to make our inquiry project more manageable, we narrowed it down to boys who were performing at Level 2 in reading and writing.

- Our next inquiry question will have a slightly different perspective. It is: “A Novel Idea for Boys’ Literacy” – In order to increase boys’ literacy skills and interest in reading in grades 6 to 8, how would we use graphic novels to appeal to boys and develop teaching techniques to engage them in exploring novel studies?

- We share our learning in our school at our divisional meetings and general staff meetings. We have also had an opportunity to share some findings at our Family of Schools meetings.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“My child enjoyed computer assignments because he is fascinated with computers and he is also expressing his creativity in plays/drama. Regarding project work, he was fascinated by the inventions convention and enjoys group projects.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Our research project has made an impact on all boys in our school since we have focussed our resources, teaching strategies, and assessment tools on how boys learn. However, over the course of this project, we narrowed our inquiry focus to boys achieving at Level 2 in order to make data gathering more manageable and to target our resources more meaningfully.

Since boys achieving at Level 2 are struggling with the curriculum, moderate gains over a short period of time can lead to fairly significant gains over a longer time frame. We were interested in all gains. At first, the gains were related more to attitudes than acquisition of literacy skills. However, as students grew more confident in attempting assignments, the quality of their work improved and the improvement was then reflected in classroom testing and finally in report card marks.

Anecdotal stories about the boys’ reactions to a more male-focussed delivery of the curriculum was most encouraging, especially in terms of boys’ motivation to complete more high quality assignments.

Report card marks showed some gains for the boys achieving at Level 2; however, with a longer period of inquiry, we believe we would be able to report a consistent improvement in the quantity and quality of the boys’ work. Standardized testing does not reveal gains made since the boys would not have completed enough standardized testing during the course of this inquiry project to validate an improvement in skills.

The anecdotal responses by the boys and the teachers described an improvement in the boys’ willingness to complete assignments and, as the boys gained experience and completed more assignments, for most their skill levels improved ever so slightly.

For these students, there were gains in the number of classroom assignments completed and the number evaluated at a higher level of achievement. Most report card marks also indicated improvement in the boys’ acquisition of skills.

Data Gathered

We gathered the following data:

- Students’ written responses on questionnaires about their reading attitudes, habits, and preferences — conducted at the beginning of each school year. The questionnaires were developed from existing materials that teachers had that related to each division. Since we narrowed our essential question to boys achieving at Level 2, we were primarily concerned with attitudes towards reading and writing because once students become engaged in their learning, improvement follows. When we had information related to the boys’ interests and how they like to learn, we programmed more specifically around their needs. We fine tuned assignments to match the students’ interests and learning styles.

- Reading logs recording students’ reading choices over the school year. The students recorded the books that they read and wrote book reports on them.

- Observation checklists describing attitudes, book knowledge, oral reading habits, decoding, and reading comprehension conducted during the school year. Teachers kept anecdotal reports on the boys’ reading habits and abilities over the three years.

- Samples of the students’ reading and writing to record improvements or challenges faced by the student.

- Report card marks. Over the three year period, we looked at report card marks and the accumulation of gains made by students achieving at Level 2.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

- Our survey questions indicated that, in reading and writing, boys have a strong preference for genres that focus on science, adventure, how-to books, science fiction, and computer related articles. Boys also enjoy shorter stories and graphic novels. The questionnaires and teacher observations reflected a clear difference in boys' and girls' preferences for reading materials. Teachers observed that when boys are given topics that interest them, the quantity and quality of the written work completed is much higher.

- Teachers observed that when boys' work is chunked with step-by-step instructions, they are more likely to complete the assignments and the assignments are completed with higher quality. Boys perform better when assignments are given in a structured format (e.g., APE – answer, prove, extend).

- Teachers observed that boys enjoy demonstrating their knowledge in a more active format such as group work, presentations using aids, computer presentations (Power Point), experiments, or project work. When there was an activity such as working with partners or giving presentations, the boys were more likely to complete the assignment and put more effort into it.

- Our inquiry focussed on a very specific group of boys who were struggling in their reading and writing. Our hope was that by teaching the boys the 3 R's (retell, relate, reflect) framework, they would be able to demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in reading responses. Some of the boys who were writing at Level 2 three years ago are now achieving at Level 3 for most of their writing assignments.

- Over the three years, we gave the boys an even more structured approach to writing by introducing APE, which we hoped would encourage them to produce a higher quality of work. The boys' writing did improve with the more structured approach when expectations were clear and they had a formula to follow. We noted that when boys are given a topic in which they are interested or when they are introduced to a topic in a manner that is interesting to them, the boys do produce more writing and higher quality writing.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

Our first step in the project was to sit as a staff and determine which direction we would take with our inquiry. This was the first time we had analyzed our students’ progress according to gender. We realized we required specialized input to interpret the data that we had accumulated (e.g., report cards, EQAO, CAT/3) in order to give us a specific focus. We surveyed our boys to see what they preferred in terms of reading materials and teaching strategies and then, with the help of our resource personnel, we designed our course of action.

During the past three years, we met many times to analyze our progress in delivering a more male-focused curriculum and to determine whether we were beginning to see results in the quality and quantity of work submitted by our boys. Over the three years, we adjusted our programs according to new information.

We devoted many meetings to collecting and organizing our data to develop appropriate programming and assessment tools. Discussions centered on our boys struggling at Level 2 and this approach helped to keep us focused on resources and teaching strategies directed at their needs and preferences. What we learned related to boys achieving at Level 2 was also helpful in how we delivered programs to the rest of the students.

A particular challenge for us in our third year is that four out of twelve classroom teachers have been on maternity leave. This year, the two teachers who initiated the inquiry went on maternity leave and, last year, two other teachers went on maternity leave.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- Graphic novels
- Magazines
- Computer software (e.g., Premier, Dragon Naturally Speaking, Power Point, Microsoft Publisher, SMART boards)

For professional development:
- **Whatever It Takes** by Richard DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker, and Gayle Karhanek
- **Boy Oh Boy** by Dr. Tim Hawkes
- **Breakthrough** by Michael Fullan, Peter Hill, and Carmel Crevola

"It is crucial to have time to meet as a division and as a whole staff to discuss accomplishments, challenges, and next steps.

**Team Member Quote:**
"The Boys’ Literacy Inquiry has been an excellent opportunity to take an in-depth look into how our boys perform using different kinds of resources, teaching strategies, and assessment tools to brainstorm with our inquiry team about how we can incorporate what we have learned into how we deliver the curriculum."

**Administrator Quote:**
Our Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project has been an amazing journey in discovering how changing our resources, teaching strategies, and assessments tools can have a direct impact on how well our boys perform. Our focus on boys achieving at Level 2 has clarified the importance of how the use of a hands-on approach with boys actively manipulating computer programs (e.g., Power Point and Microsoft Publisher) and applying their skills and knowledge to practical applications and/or the use of short passages geared to male interests makes a difference in the engagement of boys in the project.

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
genres; APE; male focused; engagement; choice
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
St. Andrew School
JK to Grade 8 inclusive

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:

While all staff were invited and welcome to attend every meeting, the following staff were regular contributing members.

Greg Krar — Principal (all years)
Lori Alfred (2005/06), Michael Araman (2006/07), Sharon Mifsud (2007/08) — Vice-Principals
Laurel Foster, team contact, Grade 1 teacher (all years)
Suzanne Cameron, Grades 1 and 2 teacher (2005/06)
Carolyn Hagan, Grades 2 and 3 teacher (2007/08)
Sheila MacDonald, JK and SK teacher (2005/06 and 2007/08)
Susan Cockburn, librarian (2006/07), Grade 1 and 2 teacher (2007/08)
Richard Setler, Grade 7 teacher (all years)
Monika Zeidler, SERC (all years)
**Essential Question:**
How can we develop a reading culture at St. Andrew School to increase boys’ motivation and achievement in literacy skills?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

We have learned that improving the motivation of our boys to read and engage in literacy activities requires the participation of all the stakeholders in boys' education. Upon completion of the project, this commitment has become an even more solid part of our school culture. Because no two boys are alike, we have learned that there is no one approach to teaching boys. However, by using many strategies to motivate boys, keeping our focus on how boys learn, and by using a variety of instructional methods, we found we could match teaching to the interest of our boys and improve literacy skills.

Some strategies we recommend include:

1. Give boys choice in reading material and choice in how they may respond to the material. We would like to see this happen in the EQAO testing, as well as in our classrooms.

2. Use many forms of active engagement in literacy activities including: working with another class, drama, visual arts, discussion, hands-on activities, choice in seating options, and reading with a partner or a small group.

3. Use technology whenever possible including computers, overheads, and videos to gain boys' interest and focus.

4. Choose texts at just the right level of difficulty and offer choice in the selection of text at all grade levels.

5. Plan ways to make lessons engaging and related to the real world so that boys see the value of the lesson.

6. Keep reading fun and as engaging as possible.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

- We have given up some “teacher control” when choosing the texts to be read in our classrooms.
- We have developed parameters for the text choices and have allowed students more choice of texts.
- We are starting to let go of the way that “we have always done things” and moved out of our traditional comfort levels.
- We are becoming more familiar with the new resources.
- We are more open to how boys think.
- We are adjusting our thinking about what we “need” to see in an assessment piece.
- We are making assessments fit better with the students so that their work is showcased and is exciting for them.
- We are using a wider range of possibilities for students to respond and demonstrate their thinking including the arts, media, oral presentations, and powerpoint. In order to engage the boys, we allow for choice in how they respond to a text.
- We are moving away from whole class text studies toward guided reading groups and literature circles.
- We are using our Literacy Room to offer more choice and variety of text.
- We have developed questions using boy friendly vocabulary. We recommend that EQAO consider this approach.

**Student Quotes:**

**Grade 2:** “I like writing when people aren’t annoying me and distracting me. You should always be allowed to write anything that you like.”

**Grade 5:** “I think that teachers should give us more time to write about stuff that interests us. I think we should be able to pick our own topics when we write.”

**Grade 6:** “I think we should be able to choose our own book and write about that book because a teacher could give a book out to the class but only some people would like it and that’s not fair.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Our plan to motivate our boys to read took several paths. One of our goals was to demonstrate to our boys that reading is important to the lives of a variety of people. Male “guest readers” visited our classrooms to read selected text to students, including the Police Chief, a professional lacrosse player, the mayor, and an airline pilot. We also invited male “guest authors”, Kenneth Oppel, Michael Reist, and Frank Glew to share their love of literacy with the students.

We have filled gaps in our school library and literacy room by purchasing a variety of high interest texts and leveled books. It was rewarding to hear boys excitedly discussing books and eagerly borrowing new materials. Having leveled texts available for guided reading to better engage boys is very exciting for teachers and makes the lesson enjoyable to deliver.

We purchased teacher resources including, Now I Get It Kits, Write Trait Kits, and Comprehension Cubes — the resources have been a boost to classroom learning. These items utilize overheads, posters, high interest texts, and hands-on dice to prompt discussion. These resources helped to engage our boys in lessons and make learning appealing.

We also sent four teachers to a workshop on “leading literacy instruction”. During this workshop, we learned of additional strategies to help us adjust our present teaching styles to reflect current research. We were able to use this information to assist our teachers in focusing their teaching on how boys need to learn. This is not an easy task and continues to challenge us.

We have recently purchased some professional development kits supporting writing to help our staff with teaching writing in relevant ways across the curriculum. We are still sharing these kits with staff and will continue to do so over the coming weeks and months. Throughout this project, we have found that our boys want to read. However, they need to learn in a non-threatening, engaging, and supportive manner such as in small groups, through the use of high interest and “just right” texts, and in situations where they can make reading choices themselves.

We have offered the ALL Star Reading Program to support primary students reading below the expected levels, using parent volunteers. This past year, we have organized a READ, RIGHT, RUN program. The children received an incentive for reading 15 books, performing 15 good deeds, and running 15 kilometers during a specified time.

Our parents have been supportive of and positive toward the initiatives. We have had positive feedback from parent comments on the report cards, letters to the principal, face-to-face comments to teachers, and on our parent survey.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

Our focus will be to further utilize the resources we have already acquired. Teachers need time to learn and fully utilize new resources so we will continue sharing and talking about the kits we now have. We will look for ways to continue to help teachers incorporate choices in book selection and provide for a variety of literature responses in our classroom activities and assessments.

We also plan to continue to use parent and student surveys since these surveys provide some useful data regarding reading attitudes, reading patterns, and feedback which reaffirms that we are on the right track promoting boys’ literacy development.

We will continue to offer the All Star Reading Program to primary students who need it. We will look for new ways to gather committed volunteers to run the program. We will also continue to offer the READ, RIGHT, RUN program as an incentive to the students.

From our parent survey, there were several indications that a reading club and more buddy reading groups would be welcome. We will discuss and investigate these suggestions.

Parent/Guardian Quotes:

“He enjoys doing it himself and showing he can do it.” — SK parent
“My son reads his novels to me. We are both enjoying the action and drama.” — Grade 3 parent
“The material my son reads for school motivates him when he is allowed to choose.” — Grade 5 parent
“Make it fun for the kids and they will do the rest!!” — Grade 8 parent
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

When reviewing the results of our attitude survey, we found that our boys have developed more positive attitudes towards reading and writing. This tells us that our efforts to develop a reading culture at St. Andrew School to increase boys’ motivation to read and write has had some success. From the survey questions — where boys were asked to answer in a narrative style — boys were very positive about reading and writing when they had some choice of text to read and a choice regarding writing topics and activities. Boys repeatedly asked for more time to read and write for their own enjoyment. This tells us that we are on the right path by using teaching techniques, texts, and assignments that engage boys and move them towards enjoying literacy activities.

Our effort to increase boys’ achievement has been successful as evidenced by the improved EQAO scores in reading and writing for grade 3 and grade 6. See graphs on next page.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

As indicated in the graph below, our PM Benchmark scores have also improved. This year our board’s expectations for PM Benchmark levels changed for Grades 2 and 3. Therefore, we were only able to compare our school data for SK and Grade 1 students including both boys and girls. Looking at our improved results, we are proud that our students are benefitting from the new resources and teaching methods.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW

Our CASI data is quite recent but also shows improvement from 48% of boys in November 2007 attaining levels of 3 or higher to 56% of boys in April 2008 attaining levels 3 or higher.

It is important to note that events often happen which cannot be anticipated. Over the past year at St. Andrew School, unexpected challenges have included three of our experienced staff taking a year's leave of absence and two more experienced teachers taking maternity leave. This year’s All Star Reading Program parent volunteers were inconsistent in their involvement and several could not continue after the first month. However, two of the occasional teachers who have joined our staff are males and this has provided fantastic modeling for the boys with whom they work.

An overall review of the various types of data collected over the course of this boys' literacy project demonstrates some positive indicators of growth in the development of literacy skills.

Our staff were already involved in the process of discussing how to alter our instructional practices specific to boys' literacy learning when the opportunity to apply for this project became available. Our staff had reviewed existing data, such as EQAO gender results. These data indicated to us that there were significant gaps in learning between our boys and girls that had important implications for instruction. We also used the assessment results to determine how well we were meeting instructional goals in the area of literacy development.

A comparison of baseline quantitative data such as EQAO tests, PM Benchmarks, and CASI tests to final results demonstrates that our boys' literacy skills in both reading and writing have improved over the life of this project. These improved results tend to support the premise that the refinements we made to instruction related to boys' literacy learning had a positive impact on student achievement. The provision of professional development aimed at raising teachers' expectations for boys' literacy achievement also seems to have contributed in a positive way.

This data also affirms the efforts we made during grade level dialogue to clarify learning goals for our instruction and review our assessment practices in order to ensure that both reflected intended learner outcomes. It was time well spent. The improved results show that teacher discussion regarding assessment for specific groups of students, so that the knowledge base of all teachers was expanded, improved the effectiveness of our school's instructional practices. The professional development activities and capacity building which took place to support the boys' literacy project goals appear to have influenced teacher instructional practices in a way which improved student performance.

A review of the qualitative data such as that from attitude surveys shows that our boys' motivation to read has increased. The library borrowing patterns also support our observation that our boys have become more motivated to read books and other text forms. Both of these results directly link to the focus of our essential question, which was to develop a reading culture at St. Andrew School to increase boys' motivation with respect to literacy activities.

The ultimate success of our school improvement process is measured by improvements in our students' skills, behaviors, and attitudes. The overall positive gains in both our school's quantitative and qualitative data over the three years of the boys' literacy project celebrate the successes of our male students with respect to their increased motivation to read and their development of improved literacy skills.

We want to thank the Ministry of Education for the opportunity to explore our essential question. We've received excellent support in terms of funding and a great research team (Barbara, Rose, and Micki) who kept us focused. The Work Plan Support Booklets, newsletters, e-mails, and telephone calls were extremely helpful. Your support has made a wonderful difference to the St. Andrew School learning community. Thank you!
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

As a staff we have become more aware of our boys' learning needs and have reflected on how we need to adjust our teaching practices to engage and motivate them to become lifelong readers. The impact of our professional learning community dialogue and sharing has enriched our teaching and improved the learning of our students.

Some of the professional development that we have experienced throughout the inquiry project has become central to our current beliefs about teaching and learning in motivating boys to read and write. We view this professional development as an ongoing process, conducted in a long-term, sustained manner.

The inquiry team meetings over the past three years have allowed us to discuss contemporary views of learning as we have reviewed a variety of research on effective instructional practices related to boys' literacy development. We have used these opportunities to dialogue and discuss the ways in which learning occurs and also looked at the implications for instructional practice.

This project has provided the opportunity for our staff to be involved in a variety of meaningful professional development activities. Our staff has engaged in learning new instructional practices and techniques that have led to professional teacher growth.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Now I Get It Kits (Mondo Publishing) for comprehension strategies — uses overheads, shared reading, a variety of groupings for responses, a variety of graphic organizers, is teacher friendly, and boys enjoy the lessons.
Write Trait Kits (www.greatsource.com) — uses overheads, rubrics for students to evaluate the text, can be used as a part of the regular program, or allows teachers to just choose a lesson to meet the needs of the students at a particular point in time.

For professional development:
Michael Reist, guest speaker
BER instructional video: www.ber.org — uses vocabulary and writing strategies to enhance math learning (Grades 1 – 2) and uses writing to strengthen students’ understanding of math concepts and skills (Grades 3 – 6). Also, for Grades 6 – 12, strengthens students’ writing skills by teaching smarter not harder, and improves students’ descriptive writing.

Team Member Quote: “Teachers can become caught up in the day-to-day part of our jobs. This project gave us a chance to step outside the demands of our classrooms and focus on a bigger picture. We were able to find ways to motivate boys and improve their skills across divisions. We were able to implement our ideas with the funds made available. While new resources motivated the students, they also motivated me in my classroom. I have grown from learning about boys’ needs and this has helped me in my teaching. I believe what we have accomplished will be sustainable at St. Andrew.”
— Laurel Foster, Grade 1 teacher, team leader

Administrator Quote:
“The Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project provided a mechanism for our staff to build a collective vision that was clear, concise, and connected to teaching and learning. This collective vision gave us a focus regarding what was important, motivated staff and students, and increased the sense of shared responsibility for student learning as it related to boys’ literacy.”
— Greg Krar, Principal of St. Andrew School

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes: choice; attitude survey; reading and writing motivation; Now I Get It Kits; Write Trait Kits
Final School Report: 2008
Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
St. Ann School — Grades 1-3

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Paul Mackett — Team Contact
Fred Hill
Leona McEwan — Principal
Essential Question: Will engaging parents in boys' literacy through home-school activities, improve St. Ann primary division boys' literacy skills?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

With the funds for the Boys' Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project, board level funding, and school-based funding, we purchased various leveled readers and created activity pages for take-home reading and comprehension building skills. We found that when parents took part and engaged in extra reading activities, they helped our students succeed and develop their reading skills. When such strategies are targeted towards the critical early years of student development, we believe that gains will not only been seen in the primary grades, but most certainly throughout the junior grades.

As a result of our inquiry, our team would like to strongly recommend the following strategies:

- All schools should develop and implement a home reading program.
- When developing a home reading program, consideration should be given to the following types of books:
  - leveled readers;
  - “word family” books (i.e., blends, long vowels, short vowels); and
  - a collection of non-fiction, fiction, and “comic” style books to interest boys.
- The focus of a home reading program should be the development of reading skills as well as comprehension activities that promote the connection between reading and writing.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

- Students have begun to take pride in their work as they continue to improve their reading skills and show more interest in completing their daily work.
- Our school's uninterrupted literacy blocks have begun to show more success, as student success stories have increased.
- Writing components are beginning to show improvements in basic conventions of writing.
- We have increased our sharing of best teaching practices — through the PLC's and divisional planning meetings — to target key areas of instruction based on EQAO results.
- For both the primary and junior divisions, we have increased our use of High Yield Strategies for Language lessons and our use of common assessment tools such as rubrics, the Achievement Chart, and Exemplars.
- For each division, we have developed, implemented, and reviewed Smart Goals for literacy and have made them the Student Quote:

“It is fun doing the reading, and sharing new books at home.”

“It is a different story each night.”
**WHAT IS OUR STORY?**

Over the past three years, St. Ann school has been devoted to improving our primary boys’ literacy skills, as well as improving the reading skills of our entire student body from JK-6. Our October 2005 essential question has become not only a monthly plan, but also a three-year school-based project. Our results have become the foundation of our School Improvement Plan and we continue to revise our essential question for the continued improvement of our students’ skills. While our school has faced many challenges, our home-school based reading and activity program has become a school-wide effort. This has created a “positive” upward spiral effect that has increased community growth, partnerships, and school literacy events. Every class has a rich take-home reading resource library along with individual student-parent reading log books that are taken home each night.

This inquiry project has helped our staff and community shape our school and strive to reach a new level of learning. Within this time frame, we have shared many success stories, seen our EQAO results rise above the provincial standard in some cases, and seen our DRA and Towre tests become strong measures.

We have enjoyed “Focus Friday” afternoons along with our partnership with Frontier College, which have provided our parents/guardians the opportunity to spend an afternoon with their children reading and doing activities. Families were given the opportunity to read in a “Smart Car” that was donated by the local Mercedes dealership. We have experienced great success with our Family Literacy nights. Families spent part of the evening playing literacy-based board games on one occasion and word bingo on another occasion. We have seen our students take ownership of the program, and our parents have definitely become more involved! This is what we set out to accomplish and we have experienced significant success.

We purchased a literacy developed computer program series that the entire school is able to access via our computer lab. These programs deal with sight words, phonemic awareness, and reading comprehension skills and have also contributed to more reading success stories. These strategies, along with school board initiatives such as the Success By 7-Fifth Block program here at our school; dedicated literacy blocks; homework clubs; and writing contests have all helped to create this positive change.

We take part in monthly divisional planning meetings and focus on improving our students’ literacy skills and targeting any students who need a variety of teaching strategies to improve. Primary teachers focus on the DRA wall that is in constant flux as students move up. Junior teachers have begun to investigate and administer the CASI assessment tool. Although there have been many factors that have helped create this new literacy-based environment, this inquiry project has been the springboard for helping us achieve improved results, enrich our PLC sessions, develop our School Improvement Smart

**WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?**

We are committed to continuing our work related to our essential question. The results have helped us formulate the basis of our literacy instruction and develop and use common assessment tools. We are using the remaining funds to purchase another reading series geared towards our grade 1 students, which addresses word families, vowel sounds, and consonant blends.

Our School Improvement Team meets on a monthly basis and, in the development of our Smart Goals, we will continue to focus on areas to improve students’ literacy skills. We will give priority to strategies that focus on attitudes, skill development, and parental involvement.

This summer, our school will be the host site for a Literacy Camp that will run for a week-and-a-half. Our students and community are already looking forward to this initiative as we will again join forces with Frontier College — our community partnership — to offer a literacy-based experience.

In order to share our successes, it is our intention to become school “partners” with other schools that have taken part in this inquiry project and have also been nominated as a “School on the Move”.

**Parent/Guardian Quote:**

“Our family really enjoys this program. Having a variety of reading materials kept my boys interested and excited, and they looked forward to what book we were going to read each night! Watching their reading ability develop is a wonderful thing.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Data Gathering
Upon being accepted to take part in this inquiry project, our teachers began developing baseline data and completed DRA and Towre testing.

Results

Figure 1: Shows the initial DRA test results and results after one month.

Figure 2: Shows the improved EQAO test scores for our school over the last three years. Scores for our grade 3 classes include both girls and boys.

* Entire school took part in program, thus we are confident that our results over the last three years are related to, not only the nightly reading program, but also the classroom lessons and reading programs we put into place.

Figure 3: Shows the results of a survey completed by parents in 2005 and again in 2008. Over the past three years, there was an increase in parents’ participation with children in nightly reading. Since, in the past, parental involvement had been very low, this part of the survey helped us develop our essential question.

QUESTIONS ASKED:
2005 “I spend time with my child reading books nightly.”
2008 “I spend more time reading with my child.”

Figure 4: Tracks DRA and Fluency Levels for ten boys for three years, who were in grade 1 at beginning of inquiry project.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Figure 1

These graphs illustrate a slight improvement in the DRA results in a one month period.

Figure 2

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Figure 3

Nightly Reading With Child

Figure 4

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<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Accuracy%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Accuracy</th>
<th>Average Accuracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>92.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>92.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88.00</td>
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<td>G</td>
<td>88</td>
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<td>H</td>
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<td>I</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>89.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* IEP students that are identified.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

- We have had the opportunity to review our personal beliefs and moral purpose. Collectively, we agree that all students can achieve high standards given sufficient time and support and all teachers can teach to high standards given the right conditions and assistance.

- We have truly discovered that data can drive effective instruction.

- We are realizing that it is important to “assess for learning”, as opposed to just “assess of learning”. This has been a change in current practice.

- Professional Learning Communities are a great vehicle for professional learning. They work and student achievement has been the continued focus of our professional learning.

- The inquiry project has concentrated our efforts on moving students, especially moving those students achieving at Level 2 to level 3.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Non-fiction titles, especially science and technology (e.g., Rookie Reader)
Canadian Geographic magazine
Sports biographies (e.g., Wayne Gretzky, Terry Fox)
Science Fiction
Series Sets (e.g., Magic Tree House, Geronimo Stilton)

For professional development:
Reading with Meaning by Debbie Miller
The No-Nonsense Guide to Writing by Davis and Hill

Team Member Quote:
“This inquiry project has become the ‘springboard’ for our entire school to move forward to develop a new literacy environment for our students in the most positive way possible! Our boys are becoming accountable and more interested in reading, and our parents have shown more involvement in all curriculum areas of homework and school events.”

Administrator Quote:
“This project was developed at the grassroots by the teaching staff. The staff have taken responsibility for significant changes in their teaching methods and in improving student achievement. The Boys’ Literacy Project was a turning point for our school in many ways because it helped to focus our efforts to meet the needs of our students and their families in the area of literacy. The project was extremely well received by our school community and it has helped the parents become more involved and more comfortable with participating in their children’s education.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
nightly reading; parental involvement; Drive the Point Home; Book Bags; Take Home Books
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
St. Anne Catholic High School – Grades 9 and 10

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Bonnie Jefford – Team Leader (Literacy Success Teacher)
Amy Lofaso (Years 1 and 2)/Kathy Furlong (Year 3) – Vice Principal
Deanna Cecile – History Teacher
Sheryl Dayus – Geography Teacher
Julio DiLuca – Science Teacher
Roger Laforet – Technology Teacher
Jenn Touma (Year 3) – History Teacher
Essential Question: Will the use of “managed choice” text sets in classes traditionally having a high enrollment of boys (technology), a high failure rate (grade 10 Essential history), and classes having fewer reading and writing activities (science and geography) result in an increase in boys’ engagement and improved academic achievement?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- The use of text sets definitely improves boys’ engagement levels in individual assignments and in subjects overall.
- The use of text sets definitely improves students’ rates of assignment completion.
- The use of text sets definitely improves boys’ behaviour during group work.
- With the use of text sets, class marks improve moderately; that is, class averages increase and average marks on benchmark assignments also increase moderately.
- Electronic resources such as Internet sites, CD Roms, videos, and DVDs must be considered as components of a text set.
- Boys definitely need more opportunities to read a variety of materials to:
  - comprehend;
  - understand the “big picture”;
  - take charge of what they are learning, and

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?
The project gave us the opportunity to:

- design collaborative learning assignments with a common end-goal in mind;
- develop a common set of strategies, use common language, and use common assessment styles;
- become advocates for differentiated instruction (not a common philosophy at the secondary level); and
Student Quote:
“My favourite assignment was the “In the Trenches” scrapbook. I got to learn how those guys lived with all the mud, rats, and stuff. The pictures made me realize how bad it was. I wonder if Afghanistan [sic] is like this.”

“My favourite assignment was building the CO2 racer. My teacher made me go back to the computer fifty times

WHAT IS OUR STORY?

The Boys’ Literacy Project certainly offered us challenges and rewards in expected and unexpected areas. The first unexpected challenge quite honestly was spending the money wisely. While resources were readily available for history, geography, and math, appropriate high-interest, low-vocabulary material suitable to the secondary Ontario curriculum was very difficult to find for science, civics, and technology. Much of the material was American or elementary-based.

However, Year 1 team members were very enthusiastic and gathered enough materials to begin using the text sets in September of Year 2. Our student body is a large (1600), fairly homogenous group of mostly suburban and rural students with very few ESL students. Our team met early to design strategies for using the text sets and assessing the results. We decided to create two or three “benchmark” assignments in each course; that is, assignments which could be repeated and results collected for comparisons. We modified existing assignments so we would have baseline data from a Year 1 group of students with which to compare.

Year 2 offered us our second unexpected challenge. Scheduling/timetable changes meant that half our original team members would not be teaching the classes they had planned to teach. We had the materials, but the teachers who originally ordered them were not available to use them. The situation grew worse with more changes in the second semester and in Year 3. As a result, we were forced to radically pare down the scope of our study. Only the teachers of the essential-level classes remained the same for at least three semesters, which we felt was the minimum time needed to accurately track student achievement trends.

That said, by Year 3, these teachers were comfortable using the materials and all reported improvement in boys’ behaviour and achievement. Teachers grew more comfortable giving the students autonomy over their learning. The work was supported by the board-sponsored initiative to promote differentiated instruction. Some teachers

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

One question we will definitely need to consider is why these boys have achieved lower scores on the OSSLT. We have not yet had time to discuss this as a group but it appears that, while the text sets improve boys’ levels of interest in their learning, the way we used the text sets have not improved boys’ reading skills.

We would also like to apply these strategies to Applied level classes. We believe this will only happen if administration is able to provide some consistency for at least two years in teachers’ schedules so they have the chance to learn how to use text sets and develop lesson plans. Our team has become advocates for this strategy in their departments, but text sets require more planning time and practice to use them successfully. The board is

teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?
DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Our assessment included both qualitative and quantitative data. The results of both types of data were aligned with the exception of the results for the OSSLT.

The types of data we collected included the following:

**Teacher Observation Checklists**
Teachers used a common set of criteria to judge students’ level of engagement in a given activity. The checklist was used during the benchmark assignments over the course of several semesters. We did not have baseline data since the checklist was not used with the Year 1 classes (September 2005 to June 2006). Teachers added anecdotal comments regarding their impressions of students’ use of the materials and students commented on how well they liked assignments.

**Benchmark Assignments**
We developed Benchmark assignments to compare student achievement over time. Class assignments used during Year 1 were selected to provide baseline data (In Year 1, we did not use the text sets), then the assignments were repeated in Years 2 and 3 (2006-07 and 2007-08). We wanted to determine whether students’ marks improve when they have access to a variety of materials?

**Tracking Class Averages for the Target Groups**
We tracked class averages over the three-year period for the target classes. We wanted to determine whether students’ overall marks improve when using the text sets? However, we felt that this was a less-reliable source of information because too many other variables can affect class averages including the relative strengths and weaknesses of individuals in the class, teachers’ varying levels of comfort with the materials and use of text sets, and even class size. For example, scheduling created an imbalance in Year 2 when one history class had eight students in Semester 1 and then 15 students in Semester 2.

**Credit Accumulation Statistics for the Target Groups**
One of our key areas of concern before this project started was the number of boys who were not achieving “16 by 16” (16 credits by age 16) and the subject areas where these credit deficits were clustering such as history and civics. Presumably, if classroom achievement improved, credit achievement would improve as well.

**Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT)**
We hoped that as boys’ levels of engagement improved, their reading and writing skills would improve as well since they would be completing assignments, receiving teacher feedback, and accessing a variety of printed materials in their courses. The OSSLT, a standardized test, measures six essential literacy skills. If boys’ achievement on the OSSLT improved, it would suggest that the text sets also improved literacy skills. For this measure, confining our use of text sets to Essential-level classes was an advantage since it gave us a clearly defined group of boys for which to analyze results.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Teacher Observation Checklists: Results
Boys’ performance in the classroom showed definite improvement. Teachers uniformly reported improvement in boys’ levels of engagement, focus, and behaviour in Year 3 in all classes. This was not true in Year 2 when teachers were still learning how to use the text sets effectively. Some teachers in Year 2 reported the boys were off-topic, unfocused, and reluctant to use more than one resource in the text sets. However, in Year 3, all teachers observed the boys:
• asking more questions of others;
• showing greater focus while learning;
• achieving higher marks;
• constructively talking with other students;
• reading quietly; and
• showing greater pride in the finished product.

All four key teachers reported they felt it was “easier” teaching with the text sets in Year 3 than in Year 2.

Benchmark Assignments: Results
Steady improvement was noted in the Benchmark assignments over the three years. For some assignments, there was a slight drop in marks in Year 2. For other assignments, students performed better in Year 2 than Year 3, suggesting that although teachers felt they struggled more with text sets in Year 2, students were actually doing better with the text sets than perceived. For example, results for History 2L – World War 1 were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit Test Average Mark</th>
<th>Letter from the Trenches Mark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1: 78%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2: 87%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3: 80%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tracking Class Averages for the Target Groups: Results
Class averages also rose moderately for students in these Essential level classes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gr 9 Science</th>
<th>Gr 10 History</th>
<th>Gr 9 Geography</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Credit Accumulation Statistics for the Target Groups: Results
Statistics for credit accumulation reflects success as well. The percentages below are for students who successfully achieved their credits in the target courses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gr 9 Science</th>
<th>Gr 10 History</th>
<th>Gr 9 Geography</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT): Results
We were disappointed to receive this year’s EQAO results for the OSSLT and to discover that the boys’ continue to underperform compared with the girls and that the improvements we saw in the classroom did not translate to the Literacy Test.

Here at St. Anne’s, the percentage of males writing the OSSLT has been higher than females for the last two years and the number of our unsuccessful writers is also higher for males; for example, 31 of 41 First Time Eligible Unsuccessful writers were male this year. Only one of our Essential level students was successful, down from two who passed last year. Analysis of the Individual Student Reports shows that all of them struggled in two of the three reading areas and 28 struggled in all three areas. Clearly we have work to do.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

It was a challenge to maintain a Professional Learning Community in Year 2 when scheduling meant that we lost some key members. Our original goal had been to implement this project at both the Essential and Applied levels in grades 9 and 10 and it was disappointing to scale it down to Essential level only. However, the teachers who stayed with the project for at least two of the three years were impressed with the qualitative results and the four key teachers report they all implemented at least some of the strategies in their Applied-level classes. Scepticism was replaced with enthusiasm when students who were seen to be “behaviour issues” responded positively to using text sets.

Becoming “data literate” was also a challenge. We realized in Year 2 that we had to be more consistent in collecting qualitative data, especially using student feedback to inform teaching practices. Adding student comments to the teacher observation checklists helped. By Semester 2, we were more aware of what to look for in student behaviour and how to manage class time better to utilize the text sets effectively. We met several times each semester in Years 2 and 3 to discuss how to collect and interpret results. Our last meeting this year turned into a discussion on the number of influences that potentially affect results and how a living classroom has many variables, making definitive results difficult to achieve in just three years.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Geo Kits by National Geographic, especially Dynamic Earth
CD Rom: Dragster Design (Advance Co.)

For professional development:
Do I Really Have to Teach Reading? by Cris Tovani
Content Comprehension Grades 6-12 and I Read It But I Don’t Get It: Comprehension Strategies for Adolescent Readers by Kylene Beers
When Kids Can’t Read, What Teachers Can Do: A Guide for Teachers 6-12 and Even Hockey Players Read by D. Booth

Team Member Quote: “I look at the boys in my class a little differently – not “lazy” or “unmotivated”, but just needing a different way to learn. I’m looking for ways in all my classes to go beyond the textbook and put control of learning in the kids’ hands.” – S. Dayus, Geography Teacher

Administrator Quote:

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
text sets; differentiated instruction; interests; take charge; comprehension
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Renfrew County Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
St. Anthony’s Catholic School — Senior Kindergarten and Grade 1
Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic School — Grade 3 and Grade 7

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Dianne Young
Elizabeth Burchat
Holly Corrigan
Heidi Ferguson
Katherine McLaughlin
Holly Chapeskie
Julie Townsend

teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
Essential Question: How does serving as or having a male mentor as a role model result in greater achievement in reading comprehension and positive attitudes toward reading for boys from Senior Kindergarten to Grade 7?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Boys' attitudes toward reading improved in all classes. The greatest gains in positive attitudes were noted in the earlier grades. Indeed, the higher the grade, the smaller the gains in positive attitudes. We wondered if this would be evidence to support that reading interventions are more efficacious in the earlier grades.

- Reading comprehension improved for all boys in four of the six classes and for 12 of 18 boys in the other two classes.

- The inclusion of new non-fiction reading resources in our classrooms and school libraries improved our boys' attitudes.

- The use of bookmarks to prompt the use of comprehension strategies during reading buddy sessions reminded boys to use the strategy taught during the class lesson.

- Concrete, hands-on tools made from hot colors card paper was attractive to the students.

- The use of bookmarks structured purposeful talk when the buddies met.

- The gender-based buddy system helped the younger students make friends with the older students.

- Social skills, such as how to greet someone and how to take turns, can be taught during reading buddy sessions.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

- The inquiry project provided more focus when we analyzed the results for PM Benchmarks and CASI.
- When assessing, we were more focused on individuals, rather than the whole class, and how to move each individual to the next steps.
- More often, for self-selected reading, we attempted to match students' interests with reading materials.
- By systematically introducing and teaching comprehension strategies before each reading buddy session, we incorporated the strategies more into other lessons across the curriculum.
- When preparing materials before reading buddy sessions, we talked more about words and vocabulary.
- We saw that the opportunity to talk supported oral language development and resulted in more engagement, so we attempted to incorporate even more opportunities for oral language in the classroom.
- When observing the reading buddy groups, we noted specific needs that we were able to address through immediate feedback or modeling.
- We learned that sometimes when boys appear not to be motivated, it may really be a matter of them not knowing how to do something.

Student Quote:
“I wish I could bring more books from home to share with my reading buddy.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

We began as four classes in two schools, one large school and one small school, to incorporate 'enhanced reading buddies' in our classrooms. We've expanded to include four more classes and new teachers, but some of the original classes no longer participate because of a change in teacher. Of course, the students change in each grade every year, but some of them eventually ended up in a class where they belonged to the older cohort of boys. Many of the teachers involved in the study at Our Lady of Sorrows, the larger school, changed throughout the three years due to maternity leaves and transfers. However, one of the successes of our inquiry project was the ease with which new teachers could be welcomed into work through becoming a buddy with another teacher already involved.

The older class was taught or reviewed a comprehension strategy for which they made a bookmark. We were surprised at how important the bookmarks became to the students. They took ownership of the tangible, colorful cards and were often careful not to lose any of them. In one classroom, they were laminated and put on a key ring, and then used for other lessons.

Both the older reading buddy 'mentors' and the younger class prepared a book or selection to read to their buddy, which was at their independent reading level. When they met to read, the 'mentor' structured talk around the reading selections using the questions and prompts on the bookmark.

We had reason to celebrate the gains in oral reading fluency and oral retells as measured by PM Benchmarks for the SK and grades 1 and 2 students. We used the Benchmarks consistently throughout the inquiry and noted that our analysis became deeper as we progressed.

We were challenged about how to measure achievement in reading comprehension for the junior and intermediate students. We began by using the Brigance Assessment — an older tool about which we had doubts about validity. We switched to using CASI for measuring comprehension and attitudes. However, we had little experience using it as an assessment tool. We did some shared marking; however, the lack of funds for release time and other pressures in year two impeded our progress. In year three, with new teachers involved, we started to focus on individual questions as they related to the reading buddy instruction, but not soon enough for us to have before- and after-data on specific questions and comprehension strands.

Many positive reflections were noted from the students’ response journals.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

- We are very familiar and comfortable with the following comprehension strategies: Asking Questions, Making Connections, Visualization, Features of Text (especially the fiction retell), and Main Idea. We need to focus more on Summarizing, Features of Non-fiction Text, and Finding Supporting Details. As staff turns over, new teachers will be introduced to gender-based grouping and teacher talk about high-yield strategies, including comprehension strategies. As previously mentioned, the grade 7 teachers have been integrating these strategies in other areas of the curriculum.

- We need to continue to update our resources to include new and attractive reading materials for boys.

- We would like to include more adult male role models. It is easy to find retired females who are interested in coming into the school to read to small groups of children or to listen to a child read, but males continue to be elusive or more interested in supporting extracurricular sports. We won’t give up!

- Besides sharing our learning with teachers new to our school, we have presented our inquiry at a Professional Activity Day workshop.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Our most revealing sources of data were student and teacher reflection journals. Student journals revealed areas of both confusion and motivation. Teacher journals captured analyses of their observations.

The oral reading and comprehension assessments we administered one-on-one to the students were also helpful as we could probe and adjust assessment levels if required. We could see that, although reading fluency is the first result reported for a benchmark, the results for assessment of comprehension were more interesting.

The attitude surveys (primary based on EQAO questionnaires; junior and intermediate based on CASI), the comprehension tasks (oral retell for PM Benchmarks and CASI), as well as the students’ reflection journals were directly connected with our essential question. (At St. Anthony’s, the evidence reported by our volunteer librarian also addressed attitudes and interests.) The attitude surveys gave us overall raw data, but we looked more closely at results for individual questions.

The attitude survey for the primary students included the questions: (1) “Do you like being read to?” and (2) “Do you like reading alone?” We noted that some of the students scored the first question lower than the second question. Overall, the score for the first question changed significantly from the baseline to the final assessment. Often, these students were strong readers. We felt this may have deflated the spread between the raw data and may have indicated that some strong readers prefer to read alone rather than being read to.

Overall analysis and interpretation is difficult. As more than one teacher pointed out, can improvements in quantitative data be directly connected to the methods in our study? How much of the improvements should be associated with daily classroom instruction? From our discussion, we felt that reading fluency was most likely contributable to daily practice. However, all of the teachers pointed out that the explicit and systematic instruction and focus on comprehension strategies were definitely a result of their participation in this inquiry project. Also, we concluded that the boys’ improvement in attitudes was linked to reading a wider range of genre throughout the year.

Often the boys were seen greeting their buddies outside of the reading buddy session. Some of the teachers used the same buddy pairs to support other areas of the curriculum. Although we didn’t evaluate this area, a couple of the teachers wondered whether the buddy system, if continued yearly, would result in a measurable decrease in bullying in the school yard.
**FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?**

**Reading Comprehension for Year Three**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>St. Anthony’s</strong></th>
<th><strong>Baseline</strong></th>
<th><strong>Final</strong></th>
<th><strong>Data Comparison</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior Kindergarten Boys</td>
<td>All boys between 0-2 PM Benchmark levels</td>
<td>All boys between 5-9 PM Benchmark levels</td>
<td>Overall improvement between 5 and 7 levels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1 Boys</td>
<td>All boys between 5-9 PM Benchmark levels</td>
<td>All boys between 15-26 PM Benchmark levels</td>
<td>Overall improvement between 10 and 17 levels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Our Lady of Sorrows</strong></td>
<td>All boys between 24-30 PM Benchmark levels</td>
<td>All boys between 25-30+ PM Benchmark levels</td>
<td>All boys improved. Teachers provided classroom evidence for those boys who were already at level 30.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3 Boys (two classes)</td>
<td>All boys’ overall level between 1 and 3+ CASI</td>
<td>All boys’ overall level between 1 and 3+ CASI</td>
<td>12 boys improved; 4 boys stayed the same; 2 boys overall score went down</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7 Boys (two classes)</td>
<td>All boys’ overall level between 1 and 3+ CASI</td>
<td>All boys’ overall level between 1 and 3+ CASI</td>
<td>12 boys improved; 4 boys stayed the same; 2 boys overall score went down</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reading Attitudes for Year Three**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>St. Anthony’s</strong></th>
<th><strong>Baseline</strong></th>
<th><strong>Final</strong></th>
<th><strong>Data Comparison</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior Kindergarten Boys (eight students)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>+16 – 52% increase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1 Boys (five students)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>+11 – 41% increase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Our Lady of Sorrows</strong></td>
<td>All boys between 24-30 PM Benchmark levels</td>
<td>All boys between 25-30+ PM Benchmark levels</td>
<td>All boys improved. Teachers provided classroom evidence for those boys who were already at level 30.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3 Boys (17 students)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>+24 – 39% increase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7 Boys (18 students)</td>
<td>810</td>
<td>1212</td>
<td>+402 – 33% increase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data from year one supports our findings that having a male mentor as a role model results in greater achievement in reading comprehension and more positive attitudes towards reading, especially for boys in the earlier grades. The results are stronger for the youngest cohorts and weaken by Grade Seven.

We did not have enough consistent data from year two for all the classrooms involved with the project to draw overall conclusions. However, the data from St. Anthony’s for year two was consistent with these results.

The information in the journals supports the quantitative data, but also provides other insights. The student journals indicated that some students found the experience motivating and enjoyable. Some boys had suggestions for improving the sessions. Some looked forward to continuing the experience as the older mentor. The journals indicated that students were engaging in metacognitive thinking and problem solving. The teacher journals showed an increase in levels of collaboration and in the integration of comprehension strategies across the curriculum. One teacher’s journal revealed the development of a leadership role as she took the lead with the inquiry team at the larger school and in communicating with the team in the smaller school.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

The evolution of our inquiry project involved the integration of new members into our group. We shared a common language and tools. Our focus was on student achievement, as well as student motivation — which had not always been the case in past practice.

We found that parsing assessments was challenging and useful. Digging deeper provides direction for instruction. Our instruction became more closely matched to the results of our assessments.

Our two schools met as a complete team only once this year. It was a challenge to ensure that the voices of teachers at both schools were heard. Pulling the study together into one whole was also a challenge because the inquiry project evolved a bit differently at the two sites. “One size does not fit all!” What works in one school or classroom, does not always work for another. We found that we need to be flexible and constantly assess to meet the needs of our students.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
X-Zone, Scholastic
Boldprint, Harcourt Canada
PM Plus, Nelson Thomson Learning

For professional development:
Reading For Meaning: Teaching Comprehension in the Primary Grades by Debbie Miller
Think Literacy — Ontario Ministry of Education
Strategies That Work: Teaching Comprehension to Enhance Understanding by Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis

Team Member Quote:
“The additional opportunity for students to talk and develop oral language leads to more student engagement.”

Administrator Quote:
“During reading buddy time, I saw students focused and on-task. There was lots of reading happening as well as serious talk.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
reading buddies; comprehension strategies; reading attitudes; bookmarks; gender
Final School Report: 2008
Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
York Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
St. Augustine Catholic High School
Grade 9 Academic Science
Grade 10 Applied Science
Grade 10 Academic Science
Grade 12 College Physics

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Charmain Barker — Vice-Principal, Former Head of Science
Dan Bruni — Science Teacher
Raffaella Cario — Science Teacher
Steve Hoffman — Science Teacher
Michael Rosettis — Head of Library
Melissa Sapone — Science Teacher
Andrea Spence — Science Teacher
Jennifer Tristram — Science Teacher
**Essential Question:** How can the implementation of targeted instructional strategies be used to improve boys’ reading and writing skills with non-fiction text?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

Our most important findings are as follows:
- A sustained focus (e.g., over the past three years) is instrumental in affecting lasting change in student achievement and academic practices.
- The integration of literacy-based activities into course curriculum achieves the greatest change in student achievement, as concepts are taught in the context of course material.
- The focused teaching of targeted instructional strategies related to non-fiction writing skills reduces the achievement gap, benefiting both males and females.
- As a result of our instructional interventions, our students are now more comfortable with writing tasks (i.e., with processing non-fiction text), which has surprisingly generated genuine interest in real-world applications of the concepts students learn in the course.
- The importance of working in collaborative teams cannot be underestimated. Collaboration supports sustained implementation and renewal of focused projects, and fosters teachers’ professional development.
- Consistent and continued funding and administrative support is imperative to the sustainability of teacher inquiry and enables collaborative meeting times, activity and lesson creation, resource acquisition, and time to reflect and strategize for further improvement.
- Strong support from both school and board administration is imperative to maximizing the success of school-based projects and professional development activities.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**
Targeted instructional strategies greatly affected the quality of student writing, especially the students struggling with reading and writing. Students experienced success through exercises involving the gathering, summarizing, and synthesis of information, and technology integration.

There was noticeable improvement in reading comprehension and writing for the grade 12 College Physics students. At the beginning, many students did not use any literacy strategies when reading non-fiction text. Use of targeted strategies (e.g., 5-4-3-2-1, Numbered Note-taking, Magnet Summaries), notably improved comprehension and quality of writing. The teacher believes this was due to many students adopting the strategies to their assignments, tests, and final exam.

Teachers reported they benefited from this teacher inquiry project and that participation in professional development helped them to incorporate many cross-curricular approaches to which they would not have otherwise been exposed. Teachers also learned more about various methods of assessment and evaluation. For instance, in our grade 9 Academic science courses, literacy strategies are now incorporated and alternative evaluation practices (e.g., magazine/brochure creation, video presentations, and multi-media presentations) are now commonplace.

**Student Quote:**
"Learning about different writing strategies, like creating a Précis, helped me understand long and complicated articles because, by shortening it, I understood the point of the articles.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Our project involved science classes at various grades and streams including: grade 9 academic and applied, grade 10 applied, and grade 12 college physics. We collaboratively developed instructional activities with the intent of designing student learning experiences to increase achievement with non-fiction text. Our second concentrated focus was to engage students in reading non-fiction text for pleasure. Science department teachers collaborated with the heads of library and science.

Our inquiry began with the specific goal of improving boys' reading and writing skills and paralleled our Board Improvement Plan and our school-wide focus on literacy. We identified and implemented appropriate resources and provided opportunities for students to read and respond to non-fiction text. We implemented specific teaching strategies to target boys' preferred learning styles. Technology was integrated through the use of e-Books, interactive Whiteboard technology, and multi-media tools. We accessed positive role models such as our male science teachers, teacher-librarian, and administrators to increase male engagement in literacy activities.

We used a variety of measurement tools to determine success: student attitude surveys, parental feedback questionnaires, tracking of student achievement, teacher journals, and circulation statistics on reading materials targeted for male readers. Our short-term goals were to establish a structured non-fiction reading time for students, implement strategies to improve written work, and provide teacher training for specific instructional strategies targeted to improve boys' literacy skills. Our long-term goals were to improve student attitudes towards reading, improve engagement in non-fiction writing tasks, increase student achievement in writing tasks, and write curriculum to sustain literacy improvement.

We observed a variety of successes. After the introduction of structured non-fiction reading time, a noticeable change occurred. Students actually looked forward to reading opportunities and enthusiastically chose non-fiction books from selections provided by the school library to each classroom. They frequently asked to take books home. Opportunities provided for teacher collaboration allowed us to develop and implement thirteen different non-fiction writing skill activities. Student achievement improved and boys were more engaged in reading and writing tasks. Teachers working on this project presented their findings at the Ontario Library Association Super Conference to provide teachers across Ontario with strategies for improving boys' literacy skills. As this inquiry was also data driven, results were presented to leaders of the Greater Toronto Area MISA initiative. Within our board, we presented findings to all high school principals and shared our story of fostering, engaging, and promoting literacy strategies across the curriculum.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

Our school is currently refocusing our inquiry to extend it to other curriculum areas, since the strategies we developed can be used in other subject areas. We will continue to monitor student achievement and reading attitudes with further development and implementation of activities. In an effort to facilitate use in other curriculum areas, we have created a web site, http://stau.ycdsb.ca/boysliteracy, which features posted materials/activities for teachers to download and modify.

We would also like to pursue the development of additional non-fiction writing strategies and activities. We have received favourable feedback from our superintendent and the board’s Student Success Leader and an offer of funding for release time. As well, our board’s Secondary Literacy Program teacher has expressed an interest in working with us to analyze our OSSLT scores and further increase student achievement. We are optimistic that we will be able to continue our good work.

We would also like to further integrate technology in teaching non-fiction writing and reading strategies. We hope to provide in-service on advanced uses of interactive Whiteboards and increase students’ use of writing templates. Continued professional development for our staff members will be key to the sustainability of our work.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“l am impressed by my son’s increased interest in reading. Books from the school library are coming home on a regular basis. My son is reading more often at home and I’ve also seen an improvement in his writing. I appreciated the helpful handouts that teachers provided on note-making and writing paragraphs.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

We used a variety of methods to collect data and all provided useful and different information about the success of our work. We sorted the data according to male and female students.

A Reading Attitude Survey showed how boys perceived their reading abilities and provided both quantitative and qualitative data. We graded students’ writing before and after we implemented specific writing strategies, which provided evidence for how to support improvement. Inquiry and overall marks, at the beginning and end of the project, indicated improvements.

The number of students performing at Level 1 or below in science classes was determined by gender. Our initial data showed that more male students were performing at Level 1 or below than females (i.e., for grade 9 academic, 40% more boys performed at Level 1 or below and for grade 10 applied, twice as many boys performed at Level 1 or below). Over two years later, and after implementation of the reading and writing strategies, the number of boys and girls performing at Level 1, in sampled classes, is about equal. See Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Number of Boys at Level 1 or Below</th>
<th>Number of Girls at Level 1 or Below</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SNC 2D1 - 01</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNC 2D1 - 03</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNC 2D1 - 07</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNC 2D1 - 08</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our OSSLT results indicate notable improvement in boys’ reading and writing skills. In both the first and second year of our project, boys achieved greater success than girls (compared to subsequent years), as indicated in Table 2 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, our boys’ attitudes towards reading may also be improving. Our most current OSSLT data from the Student Questionnaire shows an improvement:

- 5% more boys reading novels, fictions, and short stories outside of school most weeks;
- 2% more boys reading English outside school for more than three hours a week (not including homework); and
- 6% more boys using the computer almost every day for homework.

For our current grade 10 science students, we observed an increase in achievement and boys no longer lag behind girls.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class (Section)</th>
<th>Final Grade (%) Males</th>
<th>Final Grade (%) Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Average</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

We collected attendance data to determine whether there was any correlation between attendance and performance for students at Level 1 or below. Our data showed that girls had a higher number of absences and lates than boys, although both had a much higher number of absences and lates when performing at Level 1 and below than those students performing at Level 2 or above.

Table 4: Days Absent/Times Late Per Semester: Grade 10 Applied Science Students at Level 1 or Below

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Absents</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Lates</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>days</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>days</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>times</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Days Absent/Times Late Per Semester: Grade 10 Applied Science Students at Level 2 or Above

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Absents</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Lates</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>days</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>days</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>times</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We surveyed students to determine their attitudes towards reading. Our survey showed that boys are two and one-half times less likely to enjoy reading than girls, and boys are eight times more likely not to read than girls.

Table 6: Question 1 -- I enjoy reading
(a=very much, d= never)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Question 6 – I understand best when I read
(a=when I am left alone, c=when someone reads aloud, d=when the teacher points out the important parts before I read, e=when the teacher reads with me)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other results from this survey include:

- Boys are two times more likely not to make time to read than girls.
- Boys say six times more often than girls that they are more likely to better understand what they read when someone reads aloud to them; three times more often than girls that they are more likely to better understand what they read when the teacher points out the important parts; and two times more likely to better understand if the teacher reads with them.
- Boys are three times less likely than girls to not read in their private life.
- 18% of boys believe people who read are nerds.
Teachers expected our program to positively affect student performance. We predicted greater reading speed and comprehension, coupled with improved writing. Some of these changes were observable. Teachers reported that, on average, their students were completing in-class summaries in less time (e.g., 10 minutes compared with 30 minutes for the same length of material). Students’ written summaries were also more accurate and relevant than they were even a few months earlier. These outcomes were welcome, but a few teachers were more surprised by the unintended effects. Since performance tasks were altered so students had to read and summarize many scientific articles, teachers did not expect students to do additional reading on their own initiative. Nevertheless, many students, spanning all achievement levels, frequently read magazines (e.g., *Popular Science* and *Scientific American*) and asked questions about what they had read. Interestingly, most of these students were earning grades between 60 and 80 per cent.

Students are genuinely interested in the real-world applications of the material they learn in grade 9 science. In fact, one teacher reported that it was sometimes difficult to finish lessons due to the volume of questions that his students raised. (The observation applied to all students with averages between 49% and 90%). The teacher reported that this development was a clear contrast not only to previous years, but also to the beginning of the semester with the same class.

Numerous teachers noted that students were more comfortable with writing tasks. For example, every year, in the grade 9 science course, students may choose to create a magazine or a video presentation about biotechnology. Last year, in three science classes, only three or four students completed a magazine. This year, in two science classes in second semester, only three students completed the video. Incredibly, almost every student opted to create a magazine — specifically a writing-oriented task. A few teachers reported that many of their students were more interested in grammatical devices, and some students even asked about semi-colon and colon usage!

In terms of academic achievement, there was a positive change. The average mark for “application” in science classes is higher than in any previous year. In one grade 9 science class covering the same curriculum with the same teacher, the class average was 78% versus 63% last year. Interestingly, one teacher noted a concern about the lack of impact of the program modifications on high-achieving students. Students with averages above 90% did not seem to write any better or show any more interest. These students may need to be challenged further.

The major focus of our inquiry was to develop more proficient and independent learners when exposed to previously unknown non-fiction text. Our science teachers report that, presently, many of our grade 9 students are able to pick up a magazine or newspaper article and truly understand the scientific concepts discussed in the article. This directly relates to the non-fiction writing strategies we taught and students’ improved engagement with reading non-fiction text. Overall, our students are consistently achieving better in written tasks that involve the processing of non-fiction text. We conclude that targeted instructional strategies are effective in improving boys’ reading and writing skills with non-fiction text.

Our students’ OSSLT results illustrate the success of our Boys’ Literacy Project and our efforts to focus on literacy. Both male and female students exceeded provincial and board results. In fact, during the past two years, corresponding with the initiation of our Boys’ Literacy Inquiry Project, the success rate of our male students has matched our female students. Our boys’ results on the 2007 OSSLT exceed our board average by 13 percent and the provincial average by 22 percent!
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

This inquiry project helped to build a stronger Professional Learning Community in our school. Several factors contributed:

1. The opportunity to hold regularly scheduled meetings to analyze and discuss our progress and plan further activities; (2) Designated professional development sessions, such as one on the topic of technology integration (i.e., Concept Mapping Software), which helped to extend and enrich instructional practices; (3) Release time to develop common templates and strategies; (4) Shared professional readings and best practices; and (5) The support received from school and board administration, which was instrumental in helping to develop and sustain our effective Professional Learning Community.

The collaborative practices that helped us become more “data literate” were numerous. We closely examined EQAO scores and identified specific skills students needed to improve. We became more “data literate” through careful examination of our assessments and evaluations. Focusing on one component of evaluation at a time related to specific tasks helped to isolate skill development and enhance student achievement. We were dedicated to sharing and dialoguing about student performance. Our analysis of times late and student absences helped us to recognize the link to academic performance.

We implemented new practices related to collecting, understanding, and using student achievement data. Examining the breakdown of marks, specifically related to “Application” helped us focus on writing achievement. The OSSLT results helped us to identify specific skills that needed to be taught and we chose those skills most relevant to science courses, matched them to writing tasks, and tailored instructional activities and templates to address needed skill development.

Our discoveries helped to improve our practices. We integrated the writing strategies we taught into cumulative course tasks. We focused on the instruction of specific skills that built to more complex topics/tasks. Collaboration improved our professional practice through sharing best practices and dialogue. Consistent implementation across courses within a specific stream (i.e., lessons, assignments, and cumulative tasks) reinforced targeted skills and promoted literacy skills.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- DeMystified Series books (e.g., Chemistry DeMystified by Linda Williams)
- Eyewitness Series books (e.g., Matter by Christopher Cooper)
- Science 101 Series books (e.g., Physics by Barry Parker)
- Everyday Science Series books (e.g., Turning up the Heat: Energy by Ann Fullick)

For professional development:
- Teaching Reading in Science by Mary Lee Barton and Deborah L. Jordan
- Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement by R. J. Marzano, D.J. Pickering and J. E. Pollock
- Teaching Writing in the Content Areas by V. Urquhart and M. McIver

Team Member Quote: “This inquiry provided students with an opportunity to see the value and meaning of science in their everyday lives. Many students now ask questions in class related to the material read in their independent performance tasks. Although the “Application” component of student grades has not changed drastically in my grade 9 academic science class this semester, the types of questions being asked have definitely changed. The questions the students are asking are now more abstract as opposed to concrete in nature. Many of the students are able to make deeper connections between what is happening in the media with regard to science and what is learned in the classroom.”

Administrator Quote: “I am truly pleased about the achievement of our students, in particular, the academic gains made by our male students who now seem to achieve success at least as well as females. The success can be contributed to a triad of practices: the implementation of non-fiction literacy reading and writing strategies in science; library instruction and resources; and literacy practices throughout the school. Removing any one of these would be detrimental to student success. Research supports that continued implementation of boys’ literacy and non-fiction strategies by boards and the ministry is key to maintaining the academic gains made by our boys and improving marks for all students.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
writing strategies; non-fiction; science; graphic organizers; literacy
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Bruce-Grey Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
St. Basil’s Catholic School — JK-Grade 3

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Nicola Butfoy – Classroom Teacher
Margaret Cameron Milne – Classroom Teacher
Mary Campbell – Reading Recovery Teacher
Carolyn Haswell – Literacy Coach/Resource
Bill King – Classroom Teacher
Staci Marck – Instructional Leadership Consultant, K-6
Paula Slater – Reading Recovery Teacher
Monique Van Alphen-Flear – Principal

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of
Essential Question: Does boys’ achievement in reading improve by Grade 3, when teachers increase their understanding and application of non-fiction instructional practices?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

We used Me Read? No Way! to set the context for our inquiry. By jigsawing this powerful resource, our foundational knowledge of boys’ literacy needs greatly increased. We discovered the importance of having the right materials for boys in order to increase motivation to read. We learned about the need to have more than just traditional books as reading resources in our classrooms; we now have CD-ROMs, pamphlets, magazines, menus, newspapers, comics, songs, poems, advertisements, and the Internet as valid reading options. Me Read? No Way! also helped us to teach with purpose and recognize the need to be explicit in choosing our teaching foci, to break tasks down into manageable chunks, to help students with goal setting, and to provide timely feedback so students and, in particular boys, know what is being asked of them, how to accomplish it, and how well they do in achieving the task. Goal setting has become a valuable part of our classroom practices. We definitely have a better balance of fiction and non-fiction materials in all of our classrooms. More reading is happening school wide, largely due to the greater variety of materials.

“Boys were given more opportunities to read what interested them and were exposed to reading in many forms. I set goals with my students bi-weekly and noticed increased self-esteem and motivation toward reading.” — Teacher

“The boys loved both reading and writing non-fiction materials.” — Teacher

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?
This inquiry project helped accentuate the need to be explicit when teaching reading strategies and comprehension strategies. All teachers have moved toward picking explicit foci to teach during whole group and small group instruction. Assessment of student progress and setting next steps for small groups and individual students have become a part of our daily classroom practices.

Teachers worked together moderating sample EQAO reading and writing assessments and the Reaching Readers comprehension assessments and found the work very valuable. Collaboration helped build consistency within and across grades in assessment practices. Team teaching opportunities arose and a collaborative atmosphere permeated the school.

“The opportunities to moderate reading assessments with colleagues helped me to become more confident and consistent in my marking.” — Teacher

“I am more knowledgeable about non-fiction teaching materials. I am more confident in reading, discussing, and teaching non-fiction materials.” — Teacher

“I learned that each students’ strengths and learning must be taken into account whenever making instructional decisions.” — Teacher

Student Quote:
“I like non-fiction books because they are exciting to read. Non-fiction text features help me when I am reading because if you don’t know about a topic, you can learn facts. Non-fiction books have a Table of Contents so if you are really excited about a topic, you can go to the Table of Contents to see what it will be about.”

— Grade 3 student

“I really like history so I learn about the Romans and Greeks. By having non-fiction books in my classroom, I could learn more stuff. Non-fiction books helped me to be more interested in reading. Non-fiction books have facts, maps, and labels that make the book easier to understand. The real photos make things look really cool. Non-fiction books rock!”

— Grade 3 student

teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

St. Basil’s is a JK-3 Catholic school with a population that has remained at about 315 to 320 students over the course of the inquiry project. The need to teach foundational reading skills permeates through all that is done here. At the beginning of the project, we set out to show that boys’ achievement in reading would improve by grade 3 when teachers increased their understanding and application of non-fiction instructional practices. This goal was set to address the following observations made in K-3 classrooms prior to the inception of the project:

- teacher preference when choosing resources for both shared and guided reading tended to be fiction;
- in classroom libraries there was marked discrepancies in quantity between fiction and non-fiction resources; and
- teachers had difficulty making cross-curricular connections in shared and guided reading at the early primary level.

We set out to accomplish our goals through the following two types of activities:

- The Boys’ Literacy Inquiry Team led a series of professional development sessions, at which the learning community examined research-based reading strategies to improve boys’ literacy. Following these sessions, teachers engaged in job-embedded learning, including lessons modeled by the Literacy Teacher and visits to each others’ classrooms. At subsequent sessions, teachers discussed their experiences and examination of student work. This aspect of the professional development has become embedded, ongoing, and results-driven.

- We provided non-fiction independent reading materials to better balance classroom libraries across the school. We hypothesized that students’ interest and achievement would increase if teachers better understood the importance of having interest-based reading materials in the classroom that would motivate students to read. We addressed the lack of non-fiction materials by purchasing shared reading (primarily science and social studies materials), read aloud, guided and independent reading materials. We engaged in job-embedded practice by studying our mentor texts — Make It Real and Is That A Fact? — and then experimented with these strategies in our classrooms. We then shared how this process unfolded in our classrooms and how our students responded. True professional learning occurred through this active process both within the structured opportunity for sharing and on an informal basis between colleagues.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

We will continue to use non-fiction texts for read aloud, shared, guided, and independent reading. We will continue to incorporate non-fiction writing opportunities across the curriculum to give students more opportunities to apply what they have learned from non-fiction reading. Student interest will continue to play a major role in text selection for boys as we have demonstrated that, when students are interested in the topic, they are more motivated to learn, and apply and extend their knowledge. The importance of setting reading goals with students and providing feedback on those goals has become part of our practice. We will continue to set goals with students and ensure that we provide them with timely feedback throughout the year. Our focus for next year will be to continue to set explicit instructional foci for each small group during reading time for both their reading strategies and reading comprehension skills. In addition, we will continue to support students in establishing realistic short term goals and timely and explicit feedback related to their independent reading.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“St. Basil’s focus on non-fiction books has made a huge difference in my son’s interest in reading. My son is hooked on reading Sports Illustrated for Kids.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Over the three years, we collected data for all grade 3 students in our school. We administered a teacher survey in June 2006, March 2007, and May 2008 to gauge teacher classroom practices and attitudes towards boys and literacy. We gathered EQAO reading results, report card marks for reading, Reaching Reader assessment data, and PM Benchmark levels across the three years for grade 3 students. We also collected tracking data for one cohort of students from grade 1 in 2005-06 through grade 3 year in 2007-08. At this time, our analysis is not complete since we do not have exact report card marks for June 2008 (just teachers’ projections) and we have not yet received our EQAO results for 2007-08.

Our results are based on a comparative analysis across the three years of grade 3 students in their PM benchmark levels, report card marks, Reaching Reader assessments, as well as tracking data for one cohort of students over three years.

The cohort of students we tracked for three years indicated that 13% more boys achieved at or above minimum grade level PM Benchmarks at the end of the project. An analysis of the difference in PM Benchmark level attainment from June 2006 through May 2008 reveals that the gender gap decreased from a 40% difference in minimum level achievement to a 31% difference. An overall comparison between beginning benchmark levels and final benchmark levels shows that boys have increased 14.68 levels versus 13.00 levels for girls. Therefore, overall, the boys gained approximately 1.5 more levels over the course of the inquiry than did the girls.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Over three years, Reaching Readers Comprehension Assessment data shows a reduction in the percentage of males that could not access the text and complete the written comprehension component (19% - year 1, 16% - year 2, 9% - year 3). An increase in the number of males who scored at level 1 (0% - year 1, 25% - year 3) may be directly due to more male students being able to complete the assessment independently. Data from year two of the inquiry shows approximately 10% less boys scoring at level 2 than the first or final years of the inquiry. In addition, in year two of the inquiry, the percentages of boys at levels 2 and 3 (49% level 2 and 35% level 3) is much closer to the percentages of girls (38% Level 2 and 41% level 3). The final year of the inquiry shows an almost equal number of boys and girls are scoring at level 2 (56% vs 55%) on the comprehension assessment; however, 36% of the girls are reaching level 3 versus only 9% of the boys.

Overall, our results indicate that students were not as successful on the comprehension assessment as we would have hoped. It points out that, although the test was administered in May, we did not provide enough explicit teaching before the assessment to ensure student success. While we wanted to be consistent in delivery times, we realize that it is more important that it be introduced earlier in the year and be used to explicitly teach students how to be successful on written reading comprehension responses.

EQAO data shows that the number of girls who achieved levels 3&4 in year 1 (2005-6) compared to year 2 (2006-7) increased 22%, while the number of boys who achieved levels 3&4 in year 1 compared to year 2 fell slightly by 3%. However, in year 1, no boys achieved a level 4 while, in year 2, 4% of the boys did. Significantly fewer boys scored a level 1 in year 2 (2%) than in year 1 (11%). In addition, the number of boys who achieved level 2 in year 1 increased by 13% in year 2. Although more work needs to be done to increase the overall EQAO reading scores, we can see a movement in the right direction.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Teacher Survey Results
N= 18 — June 12, 2006
N= 14 — March 9, 2007
N=11 — May, 2008

“It is important to set reading goals with students.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<td>56%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82%</td>
<td>18%</td>
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“How often do you currently set reading goals with your students?”

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<th>Once a term</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The charts above show the results of our teacher survey from the beginning of the project to the end of the project. The data indicate two significant points: (1) There has been a significant increase in teacher beliefs that it is important to set reading goals with students and (2) There has been an increase in the frequency with which teachers set reading goals with students.

Our data clearly shows that we had some improvement in student achievement that appears to have reached a plateau in year two. The plateau is likely the result of many factors that include, but are not limited to, teacher changeover and level of teacher experience. In year three, over half of our 13 experienced teachers changed roles, either leaving the school or going on leaves of absence. Among seven new teachers, four had just completed their teacher training. We believe that a great deal of momentum was lost in the third year. We devoted a great deal of time in the third year to acquainting the new teachers with the project and with general programming needs.

Although the population of students tracked in this project was academically below target from the onset of the project, the focus on explicit instruction, non-fiction materials, and goal setting undoubtedly helped the students to progress to the point that they have. The emphasis on non-fiction materials held the students’ interest and motivated them to learn. If we had not engaged in this inquiry project, our boys would not have made the gains that they have over the last three years.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

We realize through our use of the Reaching Readers Comprehension Assessment that, in order for students to be successful, we must explicitly teach them how to answer written comprehension questions. Although our PM Benchmark scores show that students can orally comprehend information and retell text, they fall short when asked to apply this knowledge to written comprehension questions. In the future, we will introduce our students to the Reaching Readers Comprehension Assessment early in the fall. We will give them the assessment as a diagnostic tool and use the results for instructional next steps in the classroom. After we have taught the students how to more effectively answer the questions, we will give them the assessment again in the spring — using a different text — and gauge their new level of understanding.

The overall impact of this inquiry project on our staff is an enhanced awareness of the importance of applying non-fiction teaching strategies in our classrooms. Teachers’ belief in the value and significance of giving students timely and explicit feedback in order to goal set has greatly increased. We plan to use what we have learned from our inquiry and continue to build on our non-fiction resources in order to ensure that all of our students are able to access text that interests them. Our increased knowledge in the area of boys’ literacy learning has shown us the value of bringing the strategies from Me Read? No Way!, Make It Real, and Is That A Fact? into our classrooms and we will continue to look for opportunities to do so through our PLT discussions and mentor meetings. Most importantly, we feel that what we have gained through the process of moderated marking and collaborative planning has brought us together as a staff and as professionals. We are very proud of the work we and our students have accomplished.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
National Geographic for Kids, Chickadee and Highlights magazines
MainSails Non-fiction Independent Reading Materials — Nelson
Gear Up Guided Reading Materials — Wright Group
Shutterbug Guided Reading Materials — SteckVaughn
Reaching Readers Guided Reading Non-fiction Texts and Biographies — Pearson

For professional development:
Me Read? No Way! — Ontario Ministry of Education
Make It Real by Linda Hoyt
Is That A Fact? by Tony Stead
Reaching Readers Comprehension Assessment — Pearson

Team Member Quote:
“This experience has provided valuable professional development that has become our focus for our PLTs. It has enabled us to work collaboratively toward the same goal while using common language and research-based instructional strategies. As a result, the need for a balance of fiction and non-fiction reading materials and explicit instruction has become a job-embedded practice throughout our school.”

Administrator Quote:
“As principal, I am very proud of the staff and students of St. Basil’s. They have demonstrated how valuable it is to work collaboratively toward a common goal. Through this inquiry, each teacher has improved his/her professional knowledge of boys and their unique learning needs. I am thrilled to have been given the opportunity to be apart of this important and timely project.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
reading; comprehension; non-fiction; boys’ literacy; collaborative
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Toronto Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
St Edward Catholic School – Grades JK to 8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Miriam Obljubek – JK/SK
Eva Soradi – Grade 1
Angie Mazzitti – Grade 2
Robert Vespi – Grades 3/4
Al Gerardi – Grades 4/5
Maria Vecchiarelli – Grades 6/7
Daniele Capozzi – Grades 7/8
Susanna Gonzales – Principal
**Essential Question:** Can we empower the boys, through a St Edward Boys Book Club, to be comfortable, confident readers who are able to share and discuss their views and opinions in different settings?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

**JK/SK**
- Find “boy friendly” books (e.g., non-fiction, science, adventure, and humour).
- Have reading buddies to share the joy of reading.
- Have students keep a log of books read and a journal to write about their favourite parts.
- Have boys read to the class (motivational).

**Grades 1 and 2**
- Use short sessions in the Book Club to maintain high interaction and excitement.
- Select activities that will engage boys and encourage interaction through dialogue and programs/selections of materials.

**Grades 3, 4, and 5**
- Use computer technology and related programs.
- Enhance reading skills through boys' interest in technology (e.g., Tumblebooks, an on-line reading library).

**Grades 7 and 8**
- Allow students to select materials they want to read.
- Encourage reflection and discussion about what it is they value in the material they selected.
- Keep the discussions peer-driven and peer-focussed with as little adult intervention as possible.
- Make maximum use of resources such as Tumblebooks and library resources.
- Encourage the use of a class blogmeister as a way of posting opinions about books read.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

**JK/SK**
We did a lot of repetition during instruction with the younger kids and allowed oral discussions of the books that were read.

**Grades 1 and 2**
We gained an insight into what types of stories/books interest boys. Through quizzes, we could see what types of questions (wording) were familiar to boys and what types of questions we needed to allow students to work on; for example, students were unfamiliar with the process of elimination. Currently, our focus is on using the QAR strategy, which trains students to search for explicit information in texts. We will include the “process of elimination” during shared reading and read alouds.

**Grades 3, 4, and 5**
When asking students to draw from their own experiences to answer questions, it is important to be very aware of the books they choose. Our assessment practices were specifically suited to students' different learning styles.

**Grades 6, 7, and 8**
We allowed boys to discuss books in small and large groups and use technology to submit assignments. We modified assessments and evaluations to allow choice in reading materials and in formats for submitting assignments (e.g., video,

**Student Quote:**
“The Book Club is really fun. You can go to Tumblebooks on the computer. I especially like looking on the New Book section. But the best thing about the Book Club is that you can do it with your friends.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?
We began three years ago. Our focus was to raise boys' reading levels through social interaction in a boys only Book Club. We surveyed boys to gauge their interest in and perception of reading and sharing opinions/ideas on books read.

We invited male authors/story tellers to discuss their stories, how they wrote, where they looked for ideas, etc. to give boys insight and role models. We then determined what authors, types of books, topics, etc. were of interest to the boys and flooded the library with these. We ran the Book Club during lunch, once a week, for the primary, junior, and intermediate divisions. There was considerable excitement because: (1) the club was for boys only, and (2) there were many, many new books specifically of interest to boys. We simply focused on getting the boys to read and participate in short discussions on why they liked the book they selected. It was very informal.

In the second year, we encouraged each group to follow a format when discussing their books to truly explore style, setting, etc. We attempted to have the students give reasons for their choices, likes, dislikes, etc. We also invited a male story teller to our school. We found the exclusivity of a boys only Book Club truly worked. The boys were very comfortable with male peers and began to share more details when presenting. They began connecting the stories read to their own personal lives and also began to compare stories of one author with another. They requested books by specific authors or the next book in a series by one author. The boys were gaining confidence. They began participating more in classroom discussions and were more comfortable sharing their views in the classroom setting.

This year, we used much more technology. We bought a membership in Tumblebooks — an on-line library. The boys loved it. Our computer lab and headphones allowed boys to choose their own books. Even though Tumblebooks is not as extensive as we would like, sometimes boys chose to have a book read to them rather than read it themselves. This was effective for students with special needs or students who had difficulty reading — they were still able to participate and often used the same book as a friend. We extended the activities and had students critique books as well as state their likes and dislikes.

Overall, boys' interests in reading and reading and comprehension skills have improved. We also found that parental involvement is important (i.e., when parents inquired about the activities, the kids showed much more interest). We have become more aware of boys' learning styles, likes, interests, etc. and this has influenced our instructional and assessment methods. We also dialogue with each other more and share ideas about what works and what does not work.

This has been a positive involvement for all of us; our students, parents, and staff.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

JK/SK
- Continue with our current instructional practices and assessments.
- Ensure that girls receive the same attention and are successful in improving their literacy skills.

Grades 1 and 2
- We will explore how to empower boys to share their interest in reading with others in the school community.
- We will generate a reading wall in the library where boys can offer recommendations of their favourite books to read.
- We will implement a passport that will allow each child to rate books and add their comments.

Grades 3, 4, and 5
- We want to encourage struggling readers to participate.
- We will open up the activities to girls and use the boys as group facilitators.
- We hope to achieve higher results by including these activities in our Language Block during school time.

Grades 6, 7, and 8
- We will administer a Reading Assessment Diagnostic after the first reading questionnaire to determine changes in students’ attitudes and perspectives about reading.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
"On Book Club days, my son returned home full of excitement. First, I had to hear all about his oral presentation and then he would show me the book he had borrowed. I would be told who had borrowed it before him and also what he was looking forward to in the book. I have never seen him so excited about reading before this. We talked about books; this is something that gave me a lot of joy." — Parent of a Primary Student
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

JK/SK
- Running Records: Most boys scored at grade level or higher.
- Reading Logs: Most boys were consistently reading one or two books a week with success and improved several levels according to the Nelson PM starter series.

Grades 1 and 2
- Observation.
- Reflections, logs, and quizz scores recorded after each session.
- Running Records: With the use of data walls, we discovered that students’ reading levels have increased significantly (i.e., all the boys in the Book Club are reading books at higher levels).
- There has also been a noticeable improvement in students’ reading comprehension levels.

Grades 3, 4, and 5
- Running Records showed that boys improved their reading skills.
- We recorded some Tumblebook scores and saw a general improvement.
- After Book Club sessions, boys engaged in feedback sessions.
- A few students achieving at the lower end of the reading scale still experienced difficulties BUT they experienced a sense of fun vis-à-vis reading.
- Reaching Readers and our data walls showed an improvement in reading levels for the students in our Book Club.
- Students’ oral skills improved, as we requested that each student give feedback to the group, following every session.
- Students who were reading below level improved more gradually when compared to others, but enjoyed being a part of the Book Club.

Grades 6, 7, and 8
- Observations: We noticed that students were more verbally expressive.
- During prescribed lessons (i.e., Language Arts) students were more comprehensive in their answers to questions.
- RAD (Reading Assessment Diagnostic) showed an overall increase in the boys’ scores for:
  > recognizing text features;
  > comprehension;
  > analysis, and
  > post reading strategies.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

JK/SK
- Most boys in the Kindergarten classes are meeting or surpassing reading expectations.
- Boys' confidence in literacy activities is very strong.
- Boys seem to enjoy reading and are excited and proud when they reach a new level.
- Except for a few exceptional students, boys' literacy skills are at an appropriate level.
- Parental involvement at home is a key ingredient. Boys with high levels of achievement in reading have parents who are strongly involved with their education.

Grades 1 and 2
- Boys love to read when they are interested in the topics and can choose what they read.
- Boys love to dialogue with each other.
- Boys are not weaker than girls with respect to literacy skills.
- Boys are excited and eager to share their emotions and opinions with each other.
- Boys are interested in a variety of books.
- We changed our preceptions of what is commonly thought of as boys' preferences.
- The Running Records we did each term showed that all the boys made progress in their reading levels.
- We attribute the gains made in boys' reading comprehension levels to oral discussions.
- Students whose parents helped them prepare for their oral presentations gained a lot of confidence.
- We had more boys willing to participate in our public speaking competitions.

Grades 3, 4, and 5
- Students co-operated actively with each other and had deeper discussions about the books they chose to read.
- Students learned to use technology and often taught each other.
- Computers are an excellent alternative to physical books (e.g., Tumblebooks).
- About 90% of the boys improved their levels of reading.
- The oral discussion format enabled boys to pick up skills from each other.
- Boys' skills in re-telling and interpreting stories also became better as we progressed through our Book Club activities.
- A strong comaraderie developed among the boys.
- The boys learned to be patient and tolerant and give each other time to share.
- More junior students participated in our school public speaking.

Grades 6, 7, and 8
- The boys gained confidence and valuable oral skills that transferred to other areas of school life.
- The boys showed more enthusiasm when exposed to Tumblebooks, an on-line library. This was especially true for students with special needs who thrive on having books read to them and exposes them to more complex vocabulary, conventions, and sentence structure.
- When we allowed students to use MS WORD, they were more confident in completing their written assignments pertaining to reading.
- The boys began to be more actively involved in school activities, which we felt was a direct result of the confidence they had gained in their oral skills.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

JK/SK
- I recognize the importance of promoting and teaching literacy skills at an early age.
- I am better able to cope with the other weaknesses in a classroom. The project has given me many ideas and resources.
- I recognize the importance of parental involvement. For greater success, literacy skills should also be practiced at home.

Grades 1 and 2
- The project was a learning experience and it must be ongoing.
- The project has enabled us to obtain a variety of resources to promote success in reading and comprehension.

Grades 3, 4, and 5
- Our insight is that there must be elements of “fun” and students must feel that they are part of a “team effort” in order for them to take reading to heart. Further, when they take reading to heart, their sense of “ownership” with respect to reading increases.
- We should make this approach part of the Language Block in school so lower-level readers can gain experience, etc.

Grades 6, 7, and 8
- We realized that giving students more ownership in their education/exploration is a good way to increase self-esteem and directly impacts their ability to retain and use/apply information for their own personal growth/success.
- Students do not always enjoy technology to express their opinions/reflections and Blogmeister was seen by some as more work than pleasure. Therefore, for better results, it is important to give students the freedom to choose what

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- Tumblebooks (on-line books)
- Starfall (on-line resource)
- Graphic organizers
- A variety of genres and literacy resources

Staff professional development:
- Ongoing divisional meetings to share common and different findings
- Continue to read articles on research connected to boys’ literacy

Team Member Quote:
“This was a rewarding learning experience for both the teachers and students. On a professional level, teachers practiced methodology that stimulated and refined inquiry, dialogue, and goal setting in partnership with the boys. On a personal level we enjoyed the quality time we spent with the boys outside of a classroom setting learning what interests them, and celebrating emotions expressed and opinions given. We highly recommend this approach for all children, both boys and girls, for schools across our school board.”

Administrator Quote:
“It was exciting to see the boys gathering in the library or the lab during their lunch recess to share their ideas and talk about books. They were engaged and eager and we have seen a definite improvement in their oral skills. This inquiry project was also good for us as a staff as it gave us an opportunity to share our experiences and engage in conversation regarding new research into boys and literacy.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
Book Club; reading buddies; oral skills; technology; self-selection
Final School Report: 2008
Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
St. Gregory Catholic School
Grades JK-6

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
David McGahey, Principal
Wilma Buiting, Cathy Fergusson, Catherine Yee, Marianna Bruyere, Lise Dupont, Angie Egyed, Anne Lewis, Robin Brooks,
Christa Killen-Darou, Jill Nugent, Connie Haime, Erin Fitzpatrick, Amy O’Keefe, Melanie Stonehouse, Sonya Cox, Barbara
Santos, Nicole Christopher, Karen Geddes, Sandra Mailey

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of...
**Essential Question:**
Will boys’ attitudes towards themselves as readers improve, when offered a rich and varied mix of materials that are of interest to boys, in combination with broader teaching practices?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

We learned that boys need to be engaged. We observed three ways to improve their engagement. One is to have a huge selection of books from which they can choose. It is important for teachers to know their students in order to provide topics/books/materials that interest them. We noticed most boys enjoy non-fiction over fiction; humorous texts; texts in small “chunks” like bits of trivia, statistics, articles, and magazines; and illustrated texts that have diagrams, maps, or pictures aimed at boys. Boys are also drawn into characters and enjoy reading series by the same author. To have the books boys want to read, an investment needs to be made in each classroom as well as in the school library.

A second way to improve engagement is to allow boys to talk. Boys enjoy being social. In the past, teachers expected students to be quiet so everyone could concentrate. We now know talk is an excellent way to determine if students understand what they are reading. Talk provides an opportunity to ask questions, compare opinions, re-read together, and consolidate ideas. The value of talk should not be underestimated.

A third way is to give boys more direction. A) Teachers should model behaviours, strategies, and expectations first and then allow students to try it on their own. This permits students to see, participate, and then practice. When consistent modeling is done, we have noticed students and teachers are more engaged and relaxed. B) Teachers should incorporate more small group work and encourage oral discussion and assessment. Boys tend to participate more in smaller and less intimidating groupings. C) Teachers should “bless”* genres by reading them aloud to the class. Texts once considered taboo (such as comics, manuals, and/or gaming texts) can now be used in lessons. This provides opportunities for boys to see texts that they value are valued in the classroom.

*The term “bless” the book comes from Cunningham, Hall and Gambrell (2002, p. 52)

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

**Observation, Instruction, and Assessment**
- We scheduled regular surveys and observations. In teams, we reviewed data to determine trends and discuss next steps.
- We managed data from a checklist of genres.
- We reviewed reading logs to monitor student choices and determine trends occurring in the group.
- We ensured that work was relevant and of interest (connections to self, the world, and/or other texts of interest).

**Varied Selection of Text**
- We found that text should be relevant and of interest to boys.
- We found that text should meet the needs of students and curriculum expectations.
- We believe that boys should be able to tap into different interests and be given exposure to new text and genres.

**Paired/Shared Reading in Concert with Silent Independent Reading**
- We found that oral talk (before, during, and after reading and writing) generates ideas and clarifies meaning.
- We found that flexible small groupings means socialization for boys, intimate instruction, and is less intimidating for some.

**Technology**

**Student Quote:**
“l like to be able to do more reading by myself — like reading a menu before my Mom has to read it to me.”

“I used to find it (reading) so hard and I didn’t want to do it. Now it is more fun — just like my teacher told me it would be.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

We were very excited to be chosen to participate in this project. Our first order of business was to discover more about the boys in our school. What was of interest to them? Do they like to read? Do they consider themselves readers? After reviewing this data, we made decisions on which texts would be purchased for the grade levels. The librarian also used the data when making choices for the library. The kids loved them!

We wanted to show our boys that authors are real people leading very “normal” lives. We invited authors Marco and Sylvia Picciano with their Chihuahua, Bella, and author Shane Peacock to speak to our parents and students. Afterwards, the books written by these authors flew off the library shelves. Students started writing about Bella and adventure stories similar to those written by Mr. Peacock. Parent response was phenomenal. They were encouraged to see their children engrossed in literacy. A handful of parents were concerned that a stereotype was being created implying all boys like sports and other “typically male” topics. We are now careful not to over generalize.

When our BOOKS IN A BAG (Booth, 2002, p.19) started going home, families were excited. Children brought home a bag that contained a number of texts on a topic. There was a range of genres and levels, including texts that would be of interest to adults. The bags stayed home for a week and were enjoyed by the whole family to encourage literacy in the home. There was some great success with this in the primary grades. However, the older junior grades found it to be too much like homework. We rethought why we wanted these bags to go home and realized it was to promote literacy in a fun way, not in a way that was perceived as “work”. The bags became an option for the older students.

In May 2007, three members of our team prepared and presented a workshop at a professional development day at the board level. Entitled ‘Boys’ Literacy: Opening Doors to Boys’ Reading’, the team shared strategies on how to motivate boys and help them see themselves as readers. Professional resources and “hot” topic student titles were also shared.

Over the three years our book room has grown substantially. Through student surveys and teacher suggestions, a variety of texts were purchased. The resources available for teachers to use with their students range from big books, CD ROM’s, magazines, audio books, multiple copies of trade texts for guided reading and literature circles, as well as kits which offer opportunities for differentiated instruction in content areas. These texts excited the boys. By sharing them with all classes, the texts are novelties in the class for a “limited time only” and can return whenever needed.

The team has been working with board members throughout our journey. Consultants have been available to assist teachers with improving “best practices” in reading. This includes differentiated instruction, release of responsibility, and the use of data walls. The board also sponsored a Day of Professional Learning (May, 2008) featuring David Booth and Cindy Strickland. The speakers spoke on how to “Unlock the Potential in Every Learner”. Though the topic is not specifically about how boys view themselves as readers, it did echo the themes of the importance of knowing the learner, the use and analysis of data, and how teacher instruction moves all children to literacy success.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

Now that our boys perceive themselves as readers, we’d like to explore how to further develop their understanding of what they are reading. Here are topics that have come to light in our discussions:

1. Continue to invest in texts. New texts are always more appealing. Topics of interest change from year to year. We need to keep relevant texts in the classrooms.
2. Make use of data:
   a. How can the collection of data and use of a data wall help us improve boys’ scores in comprehension?
   b. Assessments currently being used for reporting in the class can propel boys’ achievement through the analysis of the data (data for learning vs. data for assessment).
3. Look for ways to improve prediction and retelling, greater depth in responses, and connections to materials (to self and/or experiences) through CASI and PM Benchmark Assessments.

Our focus seems to have made a shift from attitude to aptitude.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“My son looks forward to his week to get the “Books in a Bag”. He really enjoys them because there are several books to choose from and ‘HE’ picks three or four he thinks he would enjoy and, sure enough, he does. He used to cry when I had him read at home but that no longer happens. Instead, I often hear him say, “five more minutes, please” because he doesn’t want to put the book down. I think that’s great!”

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Teacher Checklists
- used by teachers to monitor the genres and types of text used in their teaching

Student Surveys
- their interests
- what they enjoy reading
- their feelings about reading
- their opinion of themselves as readers
- what they do during self-selected reading (SSR) time

Reading Logs
- trends in what students were reading (topics, genre, frequency)

Teacher Observations (Journals)
- student behaviour during SSR
- each teacher observed and took notes on three boys to monitor changes

Baseline data was collected in May 2006. Once data was collected, the team looked for trends. Decisions were made based on these trends and then more observation was done.

Graph #1

DO YOU LIKE TO READ?

- Junior students appear to have increased by 10% while primary students decreased by the same amount.
- Did the junior students actually decrease, as they were the primary students in 2006? This would be a decrease of 9%. This was not what we expected. One possible reason could be that Late Immersion starts in grade 5, when junior students can go to another school for French. Generally speaking, students who are stronger with languages tend to pursue this option. Students who struggle with language (i.e., reading and writing) tend to focus on learning English. Are we helping struggling and reluctant readers become more confident in their reading?
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Graph #2

**ARE YOU A GOOD READER?**

- Looking at Graph #2, we see that boys are becoming more confident as readers.
- For junior boys, 32.9% more believed they were a good reader in May 2008; while for primary boys, the increase was 19%.
- If we consider the junior boys in 2008 to be the primary boys in 2006, there was an increase of 29%.

Graph #3

**Primary Response: What boys say they do during SSR**

- Read a book
- Look for a book
- Look at the pictures
- Pretend to read
- Talk about my book

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

- Looking at Graph #3 for primary boys, we were surprised to see a decrease in “read a book” from 2006 to 2008.
- However, in 2008, primary boys are talking more about what they are reading, which is a behaviour we were hoping to see increase.
- An increase in “look at the pictures” is also encouraging. As young readers, primary students should rely on picture cues to help decode text. This is particularly important in non-fiction text, as bits of information are often given with a supporting diagram, cut away, or photo.
- The biggest surprise was seeing the increase in “pretend to read”. Again, upon reflection, younger primary students do not necessarily read each word, but can be involved with text by retelling or “imagining” what the text says, based on prior knowledge, pictures, and their imagination.

Graph #4

Junior Responses: What boys say they do during SSR

- Looking at Graph #4 for junior boys, we were encouraged by the increase in “read a book”, “look at the pictures”, and “talk about my book”. Teachers at the junior level perceive the increase in “pretend to read” and “look for a book” as avoidance behaviours. More observation in this area needs to be done to see if boys are avoiding the task of reading.
- In our second year, we noticed the dip in the areas of “look at pictures” and “talk about my book”. We wanted to make sure that boys understood that these were important things that readers do. More effort was made by teachers to model and incorporate strategies that showed how pictures and talk enhance the reading experience. (e.g., literature circles and visualization).

Final Words

- We are encouraged that the boys’ attitudes towards themselves as readers improved (as seen in Graph #2).
- We will pursue the use of other texts in the class to encourage boys to see reading as something to do for enjoyment and not just a school requirement.
- We will collect data more often to monitor boys’ reactions and feelings, in order to make decisions based on students’ needs.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

- Working together as a team helped us find a lot of answers and even raised more questions. There are always more questions.

- As with students, we found that motivation is connected to being emotionally committed. “How does this affect me?”

- We built our team through our successes and challenges.

- We found that there needs to be consistency across the division and throughout the school. Consider the rewards of continuing good teaching for all students over a number of years versus one teacher doing a good job with her/his students for one year. Sharing only brings forth good things.

- We found that assessment is not only for reporting purposes. It tells us what our students know and where they are still struggling. It helps us decide the best way to move them forward. This is more valuable than a mark on the report card.

- We came to understand that reading is not just picking up a novel. It is much more. Reading is everywhere: in books, magazines, computer games, poetry, and environments. Our boys knew this long before we did. This has taught us much about literacy and what it means to be a reader in today’s society.

- We found that there are many different ways to teach reading, probably as many as we have students. Each year will be as different as the make-up of our classes. We cannot rely on a “program” to teach our students. Our choices make the difference for all of our students.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Lego Magazine and KNOW Magazine
Shredderman Series, Wendeline Van Draanen (Yearling)
Bone Series, Jeff Smith (Graphix)
BOLDPRINT (Thomson-Nelson) — magazine-type text ranging from K-6 with high interest
Power Magazine (Thomson-Nelson) — another high interest magazine with low vocabulary that the boys love

For professional development:
Even Hockey Players Read, David Booth (Pembroke Publishers, 2002)
Guys Read Video and Guide, Jon Scieszka (Scholastic Book Clubs) — as well as his website guysread.com
Moving Forward with Literature Circles, Richard Allington (Scholastic, 2002)

Team Member Quote:
“When we brought a variety of reading materials into the classroom (Guinness Book of World Records, trivia, joke books, sports magazines, humorous poetry, etc.), the boys became engaged and eager to talk about them and to share the books with their friends. This opened my eyes to the fact that literature circles aren’t just for novels. We can use magazines, picture books, and newspaper articles to bring the boys into the discussion.”

Administrator Quote:
“This action research has taught us so much about gender and genre. Boys and girls no longer fit old stereotypes. The boys’ exposure to the Internet, the Discovery Channel, National Geographic, and computer/video games has excited a passion in them. Boys are reading all the time without picking up a “book”. Reading from “Wikipedia” for projects; instructions to video games; strategies to computer games; and trips to museums are ways boys are interacting with text to gather information.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
self-selected reading; boys’ attitudes; talk; pictures; books in a bag
Final School Report: 2008
Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
St. Jean Brebeuf School — JK- Grade 8
(For the purposes of the project, grade 1 and grade 6 students were the specific focus.)

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Rosemary Griffith — September 2007- June 2008
Kelly-Ann Marsi — September 2007- June 2008
Melissa Cavaretta — September 2007 - June 2008
Vera Sasso — November 2005 - June 2008
Sonia Rotino — November 2005 - June 2008
Anna Bravato — November 2005 - June 2006
Mary Strudwick — November 2005 - June 2007
**Essential Question:** Will literacy levels improve if boys are provided with more enjoyable reading materials and if there is a focus on “reading for meaning” and “critical thinking” as instructional strategies?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

Our most important findings are:

- Literacy levels improved when we provided the students with more enjoyable reading materials.
- The use of divisional book carts increased the amount of materials borrowed on a regular basis.
- Literacy levels also increased when we focused on the instructional strategies of “reading for meaning” and “critical thinking”.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**
This inquiry project highlighted the need for discussion and clarification among teachers about instructional and assessment practices.

**Instructional**
We developed a literacy room, used teacher moderation to ensure consistency, and implemented best practices such as: (1) shared reading, (2) guided reading, (3) literature circles, and (4) Reader’s Theatre. We increased the number of independent reading materials accessible to students through the daily reading cart.

Our explicit dialogue among team members promoted consistency of practice and facilitated a sharing of knowledge.

**Assessment**
Through our data-rich enquiry group, divisional meetings, and professional development opportunities, we looked at EQAO, PM Benchmark, and CASI scores to determine results related to our focus of “reading for meaning” and “critical thinking”.

**Student Quote:**
“The trolley is totally awesome. There are so many different kinds of books. On the trolley my favorite kinds of books are Robert Munch.” — Grade 3 student

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teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Action Plan
As a team, we selected three key instructional strategies: (1) literature circles, (2) drama, and (3) teacher modeling to improve boys’ literacy skills. We specifically focused on “reading for meaning” and “critical thinking”.

Major Highlights/Insights
- Guest speakers and presentations for students; for example, cartoonists Michael Wade, author of the *Then It Happened* novel series, and Log McQuaig. Guest Michael Reist who spoke to the parents.
- The infusion of new materials and resources heightened interest and excitement among teachers and students.
- The opportunity for teachers to attend in-services and gather as a team to dialogue.
- Professional development for teachers (*Reading For The Love of It, Bringing Boys and Books Together BER Conference*).
- Boys Book Club.

Challenges
- Getting staff participation.
- Change of staff and team members.
- Selecting the appropriate materials and resources in a limited time frame and with a set budget.
- Time to meet.
- Consistency in implementation of best practices.

What We Learned About Our Boys
- Providing a variety of literature increased the boys’ overall interest in reading.
- Providing boys with dramatic and kinesthetic opportunities; that is, Reader’s Theatre, increased their comprehension, their levels of interest, and their accountability for learning.

Parent Response
- The School Council supported the project and hosted the evening with Michael Reist.
- School-wide parent community demonstrated minimal interest and participation.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

Next Steps
We will continue to:
- make good use of the book carts;
- utilize the boys’ literacy bins in the school library to enhance the classroom library;
- build a more comprehensive literacy room for all divisions; and
- engage students in our instructional strategies, drama activities, literature circles, and teacher modeling to improve boys’ literacy achievement.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“When teachers model and share their enthusiasm of reading, it encourages our children to read. Providing a variety of reading materials, running book fairs, and inviting authors and illustrators into the school motivates and inspires students to read and find out more. By setting time aside on a daily basis in class, creating an inviting library conducive to reading, and scheduling time with reading buddies, students develop a love for reading and, in turn, achieve better overall scores.” — T. Mooney, School Council Chair

WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?
DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Qualitative Data

Instructional Strategy — Teacher Modeling: The teachers gathered together to create a rubric to assess the use of boys’ reading comprehension strategies and the impact on their literacy achievement levels.

Instructional Strategy — Literature Circles: Teachers created a “literature circle interest survey” to gage students’ interest in being more comfortable reading, reflecting, and sharing in the classroom setting.

Quantitative Data

Grade 6 CASI Data

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CASI Scores for Grade 6 Students
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Instructional Strategy: Teacher Modeling: Three sets of PM Benchmark scores

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Average PM Benchmark g  
13.32          14.2     15.36      18.32

Growth of PM Benchmarks, St. Jean Brebeuf School
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

We will establish pre- and post- baselines as we target instruction.

Student engagement promotes success in the achievement of literacy skills. We will continue to use interest surveys to determine students’ interests and preferences.

We will use data to inform our decision making and to determine our next steps. We can achieve this through teacher moderation, which we have been working through by grade. This approach has impacted how we look at student progress and learning.

We have learned that boys are engaged by different resources than are girls. Therefore, we have included more non-fiction texts, graphic novels, comics, and informational texts in both the literacy room and the school library.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- Graphic novels and comics
- Non-fiction and informational text
- *Bold Print Magazine* to support struggling readers (it contains many text features)

For professional development:
- Professional development for teachers: Micki Clemens in-serviced staff on boys’ literacy
- Guest speakers and presentations: Michael Wade, author of the *Then It Happened* novel series, Log McQuaig, and Michael Reist
- Publisher’s Display (open to other schools)
- Opportunities for teachers to attend in-services and gather as a team to dialogue

Conferences: *Reading ForThe Love of It* and *Bringing Boys and Books Together BER*

Team Member Quote:
“Thie project has been beneficial for teachers and our boys. It provided collaboration and insightful discussions about instructional strategies among teachers and has given boys the opportunity to creatively engage in literacy activities.” — Vera Sasso, Teacher

Administrator Quote: “The Boys’ Literacy Inquiry Project has made reading and learning fun at St. Jean Brebeuf. With the ministry grant, we were able to provide students with suitable reading materials such as magazines, newspapers, manuals, comics, and high interest, non-fiction, guided reading materials that appeal to their interests. The teacher librarian purchased materials from the “Forest of Reading” and provided opportunities for the students to join either the Boys or Girls Book Clubs to discuss the books over lunch. Teachers attended various in-services and conferences to learn more about the strategies that engage students in their own reading and learning. Overall, a great learning experience and an opportunity to improve student achievement.” — S. Rotino, Principal

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
Reader’s Theatre; drama; literature circles; book carts; comprehension bins
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
London District Catholic School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
St. John French Immersion Catholic School – Grades 1 - 3

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Alison Ossenkopp
Meaghan McGrath
Essential Question: How can we make 200 minutes of core English effective in a French Immersion School? By effective, we mean closing the gaps between boys and girls in the Literacy Program for Grades 2 and 3.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Choose resources that appeal to boys (e.g., non-fiction texts, sports, science-related themes, current events, Guinness World Record books, and fiction novels with relevant topics and graphics).

- Allow students to use technology; for example, to research non-fiction topics using the Internet or CD-ROM encyclopaedias; or to transfer rough copies of written work into a word document or the computer program Easy Book Deluxe to publish a book with accompanying illustrations.

- Decrease the overlap of instructional strategies used during both English and French classes.

- The Four Blocks approach is difficult to implement because the English instructor can teach only one block per week, while the classroom teacher teaches the other three blocks each day in French. This arrangement makes it difficult to maintain students’ interest and excitement.

- Students gain enthusiasm during shared and guided reading.

- Teacher and peer modelling is important to increase a sense of accomplishment and confidence.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

- Our increased instructional time doing shared reading activities using Big Books improved comprehension and created a love of reading.

- We used fewer pencil-and-paper tasks and more checklists and anecdotal records for assessments.

- Students were more engaged during writing activities when we decreased the number of pencil-and-paper-tasks.

Student Quote:
“The Bold Print books were pretty interesting. They are full of information. The pictures were good because they had a lot of detail and went with the text. They had good fiction and non-fiction stories. We really like to read sports and history books and the newspaper for sports scores.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

We are a French Immersion catholic school currently in our fourth year of an Early Immersion program, in which the only subjects taught in English are Religion and English. We are working toward developing students' literacy skills in both languages while minimizing the overlap of expectations in both French and English classes.

Over the last three years, we grew professionally and also watched our students grow academically and become more enthusiastic about reading. We participated in a number of professional learning activities that included Four Blocks training and a Shared and Guided Reading workshop provided by Scholastic Canada. There was an increase in collaboration among our grades 2 and 3 teachers (French and English itinerant), from which our students benefited from our more structured programming.

We found it particularly rewarding to provide our students with new and relevant reading resources and more focussed reading lessons. It was also rewarding to hear parents share with us that their children had become more engaged in reading at home and were more willing to share their work and read for enjoyment.

We took advantage of opportunities to share our work with other schools and the community of London. In November 2007, we had the opportunity to share our love of reading during our local news station breakfast television show (A-Channel London). Students were filmed reading and interviewed about their interests in reading and how their teachers engaged them in reading.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

Now that we have engaged boys in reading, our next steps include aligning our reading and writing activities more efficiently. For example, in order to teach procedural writing, students need to see visual models of written procedures prior to completing their writing tasks.

It would be beneficial for our school to set a computer/technology schedule that makes better use of our computer lab and would allow itinerant teachers to incorporate technology into the English curriculum.

To share our findings, we should create a PLC among FI staff in our board and our co-terminus board.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“It is apparent to me that boys prefer non-fiction reading materials (e.g., Guinness Book of Records and fact books about animals) to fiction.”

“Our child takes pride in his reading because of the confidence that he gains from daily reading.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?
DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Qualitative Data: Student Attitude Survey
Our first method of collecting qualitative data was through a student attitude survey administered at the beginning of the project and at the end of each subsequent school year. The survey data informed us of the students’ reading interests as well as which reading strategies they were actively using. The most recently administered survey showed us whether or not students’ motivation and enthusiasm related to reading had increased. We find these data particularly interesting, as we can now expand on our understandings and learn more about what interests and motivates our students.

Qualitative Data: Parent Attitude Survey
We administered a parent survey in spring of 2007 and 2008, which allowed parents to share information about their children’s reading habits, needs, and concerns. The 2008 survey allowed parents to communicate with teachers about growth they have observed in home reading habits over the three year period. Parent surveys are very important to us because the data allows us to see the transfer process between home and school.

Qualitative Data: Observation/Anecdotal Records
We made observation/anecdotal records throughout the course of the project to provide insight into what strategies were benefiting or not benefiting our male students. We also used this information to inform us about what strategies still needed further development.

Quantitative Data: PM Benchmarks
Our first method of collecting quantitative data was through the administration of PM Benchmarks. The results indicated whether or not students had improved their levels of reading as well as their comprehension and higher-order thinking skills. The results enabled us to see the growth and correlation between male and female reading levels and whether the gender gap was decreasing.

Quantitative Data: Report Card Marks
We used report card marks to demonstrate improvement in the area of reading. We made comparisons between boys and girls and compared report card marks with those prior to starting the project.

Quantitative Data: EQAO Test Results
Our French Immersion students do not complete the English language EQAO test. However, we did administer a sample from the 2006 EQAO test to our students in grade 3, who are now currently in grade 4 (not the test group) and a sample from the 2007 EQAO test to our current grade 3 students, who participated in this study. The EQAO test results will allow us to compare basic comprehension skills between a group who participated in our project since 2006 and a group who has not participated.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Our quantitative data indicates that reading levels and comprehension/understanding improved for all of our boys. The graphs below show the PM Benchmark results for three years and the report card reading marks for the last two years.

The first graph indicates that, at the beginning of our project, students were reading and decoding between a level 2 and 23. By the end of the project, students were reading between a level 8 and 30. Most of the boys improved their reading by at least 6-10 levels and also increased their comprehension/understanding of what they were reading. Prior to the study, the students were decoding, but not understanding the higher levelled texts. Now the students are consistently understanding what it is that they are reading, at the level that they have attained.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

The second graph on the previous page indicates that the boys’ report card reading grades improved. We compared reading marks for Term 1 2006 with reading marks for May 2008. The majority of the boys (13 of 18) improved their reading grades, four achieved the same grade, and one had a lower grade. At the beginning of this project, 67% of our boys were reading at or above Level 3 and, in May 2008, the percentage increased to 78%.

Parent and student surveys administered in spring 2007 and 2008 showed an increased interest in reading among the boys both at school and at home. The increase was very much dependent upon what was available for the boys to read. When provided with material of no interest to them, the boys had very little enthusiasm. When provided with materials with rich print and graphics, the boys’ level of interest exceeded what we would have ever expected. We also found it helpful to lead the boys to understand that reading does not always have to be a chapter book.

Two resources that have clearly motivated the boys’ interest in reading are: (1) Nelson’s Bold Print series and (2) Scholastic’s Literacy Place, shared and guided reading packages. The enthusiasm for both of these resources had a direct impact on the boys’ motivation for writing. Not only did we see an increase in the motivation to read, but we also saw an increase in the desire to write when given a task related to the book or topic that we were studying.

We examined our anecdotal records for the last three years. We had boys in grade 2 last year who were not motivated at all to read, had sloppy printing, and had very little pride in anything that they accomplished (English/French related tasks). We also noticed that we had many boys who were exceptionally good readers, but did not enjoy reading. They were bored and reading because it was an obligation. Our use of the new resources we purchased, along with our attempt to implement a Four Blocks approach, led to a new love of reading for the boys (and even the girls). The students’ excitement in our lessons is incredible and a pure joy to watch and share. In the words of an English Itinerant Teacher:

“I now have the boys rushing over to show me ideas or quotes from a book they are reading or to share their writing with me, as often as the girls always have. The pride our boys have in their writing has significantly increased and is strongly correlated with their new found confidence in and enthusiasm for reading.”
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

We began three years ago with a common concern for our boys’ lack of motivation to read and their poor reading comprehension. We were faced with the challenge that our students were spending 75% of their day learning a second and sometimes a third language (French) and 25% of their day in literacy instruction in English. Our goal was to make reading fun and improve reading comprehension.

We created a Professional Learning Community that met regularly to discuss our concerns and strategies and how we could improve literacy skills. Each teacher implemented different strategies throughout the three-year project and we met to follow up on which strategies were successful and provide feedback to one another.

We planned collaboratively in order to avoid overlapping the teaching of certain expectations. Conversely, we also taught important expectations simultaneously in order to reinforce the learning.

We continue to collect data about student achievement and examine it to guide our teaching practices. Further collaboration will be necessary to ensure that all teachers are on board with our new practices related to collecting, understanding, and using data effectively.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Bold Print and Double Take Chapter Books – Nelson and Thomson
Literacy Place Grades 2 and 3 Package – Scholastic

For professional development:
Four Blocks – Carson-Dellosa Publishing Company, Inc.
Teaching Guides – Literacy Place – Scholastic Canada
Guide to Effective Instruction In Reading – Ontario Ministry of Education

Team Member Quote:
“The Boys’ Literacy Initiative has made us more aware of our teaching practices and how to best meet the needs of all students, particularly the boys. It has been extremely rewarding to observe the increase in motivation to read among the boys.”

Administrator Quote:
“This initiative provided the impetus for much positive change in the area of literacy in our French Immersion Catholic School. The funding helped redirect our energies with resources and P.D., and helped motivate staff to look at continuous improvement of literacy strategies, keeping the boys in mind.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
Four Blocks; literacy; itinerant; immersion; shared and guided reading
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
St. Joseph High School — Grades 9 and 10 Applied and Locally Developed English Classes

Teacher Inquiry Team Members: Kevin Mulvey — Principal; Daniela Koppeser — Team Leader, Literacy Success Teacher
Bernard Howes — Student Success Teacher
Carol Morga — Guidance Counsellor
Tammy Azar — Teacher
Richard Bedard — Teacher
Aldo Bertucci — Teacher
Deanna Cullion — Teacher
Jennifer Donais — Teacher
Deirdre Drouillard — Teacher
Matthew Hind — Teacher
Rosemary LoFaso — Teacher
Teresa Lucchino — Teacher
Lisa McGuire — Teacher
Kim Pearce — Teacher
Bernadette Raffoul — Teacher
Marilyn Young — Teacher
**Essential Question:** What is the impact of incorporating soccer-themed activities in our multicultural school on improving boys’ motivation to read, OSSLT pass rates, and course success rates for boys enrolled in the ENG 1P/L, ENG 2P/L, and ELS 300 courses?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

**Sports, particularly soccer, can be a way to engage boys in the classroom**
Research tells us that boys like to read about sports. The boys in our project showed improved attitudes and achievement in reading when they were reading about soccer in their English classes. The reading materials in our soccer literacy project included soccer-themed young adult novels, soccer magazines, rulebooks, and skill manuals.

**Building a spirit of competition can be a powerful motivator for boys**
Sports have an element of competition embedded in them. In the second year of the project, the team decided to capitalize on this aspect of sport by designing a culminating activity where the classes in the program competed against one another for the “Literacy Cup”. Students worked in groups to research information about a soccer-playing country and then presented their research to a panel of judges. As a final incentive, the winning class won a pizza party. Food, especially pizza, can certainly raise the stakes of the game. An unexpected outcome of the project is that the competitive atmosphere built a sense of community within classes. As students worked together to create posters, banners, and team jerseys for their countries, they felt a sense of belonging to their peers and ownership for their literacy project.

**Boys thrive on social and active learning opportunities**
While students in the project read about soccer in the classroom, they also participated in soccer-themed activities with their peers outside of the classroom. For example, the students participated in a soccer clinic where they read about the rules of the game and then ran some soccer drills and scrimmages. The students also wrote instructions for delivering a soccer drill and then demonstrated them in front of the class.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

Our inquiry project impacted instructional practices at our school by fostering a culture of innovation. The soccer literacy program provided teachers with a creative means to meet the expectations of the English curriculum. First, the project allowed us to question the texts that are traditionally part of the English curriculum. By the end of the project, our team learned that books about soccer are as apt a resource as the novels traditionally taught in the curriculum.

The project encouraged us to reflect upon our practice. As we collected and analyzed data, we used the findings to reflect upon our instructional practices. This helped us to refine our instructional practices to support boys' literacy skills in our classrooms.

The project also introduced our team to some new assessment practices. For example, in the final year of the program, our team used consensus marking to evaluate the reading and writing assessments. Consensus marking was an effective strategy since it opened up discussion about student writing. It also validated our assessment practices as we worked to come to a consensus about the evaluation of student writing. This helped us to corroborate the results of the study.

**Student Quote:**
“Reading is cool when you enjoy it. You just need to know what you like. I like to read sports articles in the newspaper and I like to read sports books. I really enjoyed the book we finished reading called Striking Distance. I only like reading if the book sparks my interest.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

The story of St. Joseph High School begins quite literally on the soccer field. Our school principal, Kevin Mulvey, is a self-described “soccer fanatic”. Our school also has a strong soccer culture. Since the inception of the project, our school has either qualified for or hosted the OFSAA soccer championships. In the second year of the program, our senior boys’ soccer team was OFSAA champions! Many of the boys in the program were able to watch the final game as our city hosted the finals. Our school is preparing to host the OFSAA championships this year. It is no wonder then that our team proposed a soccer literacy program to improve boys’ literacy.

The soccer literacy program kicked off each semester with a staff versus student soccer game in the gymnasium. The students in the program were called down to play and/or watch the game. The students in these classes are traditionally not involved in school activities, so the soccer game became an event just for them.

After the kick-off, the students in the project read about soccer in their English classes. The reading materials included both fiction and non-fiction books and magazines about the sport. The students were also engaged in many literacy-based activities including writing news reports about soccer matches they watched and read about, reviewing matches in newspapers and magazines, debating and writing opinion pieces on fan violence in soccer, and writing instructions for delivering soccer drills.

Whenever possible, these literacy lessons were integrated with playing soccer. Students participated in a soccer clinic where they learned the rules of the game and then ran some soccer drills and scrimmages. One of the highlights for the boys was when several soccer players from the University of Windsor Men’s Soccer Team came in to speak to them about the values of school and sport (and to show them some tricks).

The project culminated each semester in a “Literacy Cup Competition”. All the classes in the project were assigned a soccer-playing country to represent at the competition. Students worked in groups to research information about a country and then presented this research to a panel of judges (including our school principal). The presentations included music, dancing, and many different languages. Some classes even created buttons and costumes for their countries and performed ethnic dances. In the afternoon, students played a mini soccer tournament against each other.

So, our story begins and ends on the soccer field. The hope of our inquiry team is that our school will continue to embrace both soccer and reading and show our boys that the two are not mutually exclusive.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

Our team would like to build a more cross-curricular school-wide focus on soccer next year. While the program has been running in the English classes, we would like to extend the program to include other subject areas. At the end of the last year of this project, a team of teachers met to think of ways to incorporate soccer into their subject areas. Our plan is to share these ideas with all grades 9 and 10 teachers so they can build a unit around soccer.

Our team would also like to share the soccer resources with classes beyond the grades 9 and 10 English classes. Our plan is to set up a display in the library advertising some of the novels and texts and to make several copies of each resource available for circulation to the whole school population.

Finally, our team would like to share our insights and build a soccer partnership with some of our family of schools. The team would also like to build transition activities with the students in our family of schools. For example, students in the soccer literacy program could write and run drills for students in our family of schools. Perhaps elementary students could visit our school to hear the guest speakers or even complete a shared novel unit.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Attitude Data

Students completed a pre- and post-attitude survey to gauge changes in their attitudes toward reading. The results were tallied for all of the boys in the project and entered into a spreadsheet to calculate the percentages. The team decided to focus on the questions that were most relevant to our essential question: “I like to talk about ideas and information after I have read something”, “I enjoy reading at home”, and “Reading is boring”. The results show some improvement in boys’ attitudes toward reading over the duration of the project. As shown in the charts below, boys were more likely to talk about ideas and information after they read about soccer. The percentage of boys who agreed (to some degree) with this statement increased from 69% to 85% by the end of the project.

Boys also tended to enjoy reading more at home after reading about soccer. As shown in the charts below, the percentage of boys who strongly agreed with this statement increased by seven percentage points. These results are corroborated in the charts that follow as fewer boys (8%) strongly agree that reading is boring.

PRE - 2. I like to talk about ideas and information after I have read something.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I disagree</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree a little</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

POST - 2. I like to talk about ideas and information after I have read something.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I disagree</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree a little</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PRE - 3. I enjoy reading at home.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I disagree</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree a little</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

POST - 3. I enjoy reading at home.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I disagree</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree a little</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PRE - 12. Reading is boring.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I disagree</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree a little</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

POST - 12. Reading is boring.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I disagree</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree a little</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

We also conducted interviews to collect qualitative data about students’ attitudes toward reading. The team met at the end of the semester to analyze the interviews for themes. We decided to focus on five questions for our analysis: (1) Do you think you are a good reader? How do you know? (2) What do you like to read? Why? (3) As a reader, what would you like to do better? (4) Is reading a necessary life skill? Why or why not? (5) Compared to the other skills you have, how important is reading to you?

Some of the themes that emerged from our analysis were that most boys do not think they are good readers. When they do read, they enjoy reading about sports and other “interesting things”. They tend to enjoy non-fiction more than fiction because they like to “read about things that are real”. As readers, they would like to read faster, read more often, and remember what they read. Almost all of the boys viewed reading as important and a necessary life skill. A gender difference the teachers noted is that boys tend to view reading as more connected to the outside world, particularly to their future schooling or work, than do girls.

As a further qualitative measure, we kept anecdotal notes about boys’ attitudes to the soccer program in an observation journal. Below is an excerpt from one of the teachers’ journals:

“They enjoyed reading the chapter novels aloud together and discussing the storylines, and doing the scavenger hunts in the soccer textbooks with all of the interesting facts and terminology. They participated willingly in the outdoor and indoor soccer clinics and they had some good old fashioned “fun” in being active. They also admired the way the University of Windsor soccer players balanced sport with academics and they were inspired by this to strive for more in their own lives. They LOVED watching the various soccer themed films (documentaries and fictional) while working through the accompanying film studies which helped them properly learn to deconstruct the sources of media they are so much intertwined with on a daily basis. They looked forward to the Literacy Cup event and they quite diligently researched their designated countries in preparation.”

Achievement Data

Students completed a pre- and post-reading assessment to measure changes in reading achievement during the project. The students read an excerpt from a soccer rule book and responded to a series of closed- and open-ended questions. The team used collaborative marking to evaluate student reading and writing.

![Reading Assessment - Pre vs Post (Boy's Literacy)](image)

The results show an increase of 12 percentage points in achievement from the pre- to the post-assessment. While most of the students showed some improvement, the project made a particular impact on eight students who made a gain of four points or more on the measure.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

The team also used scores on the OSSLT as a measure of reading achievement. As the results below show, boys’ scores on the OSSLT have shown an upward trend over the past three years. While the success rate for boys remained the same in March 2007, the overall school success rate dropped by three percentage points, so boys overall made a gain in March 2007. Our team is currently awaiting the results from the 2008 administration of the OSSLT.

OSSLT Results For First Time Eligible Boys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>October 2004</th>
<th>March 2006</th>
<th>March 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Successful</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, the team looked at classroom achievement data as recorded on the Secondary Provincial Report Card. The team looked at boys’ final marks in Applied and Locally Developed English classes for the past two years. As shown in the graph below, the percentages of boys who were successful in Applied and Locally developed English classes have either stayed the same since 2005-06 or improved. Most notably, 23% more boys in the Grade 9 Locally Developed English classes were successful in 2006-07.

![Trends in Achievement Data for Boys in Grade 9 and 10 English Classes](image)

Conclusion
So, it seems that, based on our data, when boys do read, they really do score. It’s a GOAALLL for boys’ literacy!
**WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?**

The most notable impact on us as educators is that the project fostered a spirit of collaboration in our school. The teachers in the program met throughout the project to discuss our essential question. As high school teachers, we tended to be isolated in our classrooms and teaching areas; however, the project brought us together for purposeful meetings and opened up professional dialogue about what we were doing in our classrooms. We also worked together as a team to design curriculum for the program.

Another impact was that the project raised awareness in our school and community about the gap in boys’ literacy skills. For example, our soccer literacy program was featured in school newsletters and on the local television news. The project made us think more consciously about the way we traditionally teach reading in our schools and its impact on boys. The project laid the foundation for making more lasting changes in instructional practices in our school to meet the needs of reluctant readers.

The project also provided an opportunity for professional development. Throughout the project, the team researched effective reading instructional practices for boys. As we researched, we discovered many resources for boys and professional development. The project also introduced new instructional and assessment practices in our school. For example, the team used collaborative marking to evaluate reading and writing assessments.

Perhaps most importantly, the project changed the way that we traditionally view our classrooms. During the project, the classroom became a “living lab” as the teachers thought more scientifically about the work that we do as teachers. This was empowering as it allowed us to regain a sense of control over our teaching and student learning.

**WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?**

For Boys:

- **Fiction:** Striking Distance by H.A. LeVigne; Home of the Braves by David Klass; Tangerine by Edward Bloor; and K is for Kick: A Soccer Alphabet by Brad Herzog

- **Nonfiction:** Kickin’ It (Boldprint Series); Soccer (Eyewitness Books); and The Everything Kids’ Soccer Book by Deborah W. Crisfield

For professional development:

- Boys and Literacy: Practical Strategies for Librarians, Teachers and Parents by Elizabeth Knowles and Martha Smith
- Differently Literate: Boys, Girls and the Schooling of Literacy by Elaine Millard
- Masculinity Goes to School by Rob and Pam Gilbert.

**Team Member Quote:**

“The soccer literacy project was very successful and an exciting process. Across the two years that I was involved, I observed a fresh awareness in my male students and I suspect this was related to the way they connected to their materials, which all delivered information in various forms about SOCCER. They seemed to develop a positive attitude toward reading and writing and they also seemed quite proud of their personal growth during this journey. For this reason alone — to see those self-assured faces — it was all very worthwhile.”

**Administrator Quote:**

“It has been very gratifying to observe students stretching and applying their literacy potential as they have engaged enthusiastically in the activities. The guest speaker program has provided some excellent male role models and the staff-student games and the inter-class competitions have enhanced the overall school climate as well as the literacy skills of the student participants. Altogether, this has been a most welcome initiative.”

**List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:**

- sports
- soccer
- attitude
- achievement
- competition
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Nipissing-Parry Sound Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
St. Joseph-Scollard Hall Catholic Secondary School – Grades 9 and 10

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Micheline Pride
Mark Mechefske
**Essential Question:** Will regular reading of materials that are interesting to boys increase their engagement in reading and their literacy results?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Regular use of reading kits helps set the tone that literacy is important in every classroom, whatever the subject-area.
- Regular use of reading kits ensures that students have sustained silent reading on a daily basis.
- Boys need material that is of interest to them to stay engaged in sustained silent reading.
- When surveyed, our boys responded that they prefer magazine-type materials or “quick reads”, which were second only to web sites, emails, and internet chatting. Therefore, we determined that the majority of our boys read for information. This reflects students’ changing needs and the reality of their world.
- Our focus was on reading when we began our project but, after reviewing our data, we must now focus on boys’ writing.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

- Having interesting materials available not only feeds boys’ interests, but helps them remain focussed and on-task. The result is less disruptive behaviour in the classroom.
- Having interesting materials contributes to successful classroom management strategies.
- The sustained silent reading program at St. Joseph-Scollard Hall is well established and the staff and students see first-hand the value of daily engagement in reading and its impact on students’ attitudes.

Student Quote:

“The Reading Kits have improved my interest in reading because we can read material we want to read, not material we have to read. This makes it easier to engage in reading.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

We embarked on this journey with the hope that having interesting materials readily available for boys to read during our school’s sustained silent reading time would improve participation and impact boys’ literacy skills. It took some time for us to begin using the kits in the first year. However, in the second year, we placed the kits in a more accessible location, which facilitated the process of signing them out.

In Year 2, we began getting positive feedback from both teachers and students. However, the quantitative data – credit achievement, Literacy Pretest, and EQAO OSSLT scores – did not show improvement in boys’ literacy skills. We found it difficult to prove that the regular use of the kits was impacting boys’ achievement in literacy. By the end of Year 2, we decided to change our essential question to reflect some of the qualitative data, which indicated that the kits had an impact on boys’ interest in reading. The qualitative data indicated that students gained knowledge and insight in varied areas due to reading the materials provided in the reading kits. Teachers commented often that when the silent sustained reading time was over, many students wanted to talk about the information they had read and that the materials were often the springboard for good conversation and “teachable moments”.

We also began using the kits when students finished their class work to keep them engaged and on-task. This strategy assisted us with classroom management.

Student interest surveys conducted in Year 2 indicated that students appreciated having the opportunity to give their recommendations for materials for the kits. This gave them a sense of shared ownership in the project. The information from the surveys also assisted us in purchasing materials for the kits. Teacher surveys conducted in Year 2 indicated teachers did not necessarily notice an improvement in boys’ literacy achievement marks; however, they reported that the kits assisted them in classroom management and in setting the tone of literacy.

In Year 3, the majority of the kits are signed out on a regular basis. Again, the regular use of the kits has not impacted marks and our 2007 EQAO data does not support an increase in literacy achievement. However, the students accept and actively participate in the daily sustained silent reading program at our school.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

We are beginning conversation about what our project will look like in 2008-09. Our school will continue our focus on literacy by having a literacy chat at our monthly staff meeting.

We have seen an increase in the number of struggling readers and would like to improve literacy skills through the use of technology. We are currently investigating computer literacy programs that could be used in classes with struggling readers. Our quantitative data have also indicated that we must begin to focus on boys’ writing as well.

We hope that having interesting materials readily available has encouraged teachers to compile their own libraries in their classrooms to use during sustained silent reading time and that seeing the impact sustained silent reading has on student engagement will encourage teachers to sustain this practice, even after the completion of the project.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?
DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

We collected both qualitative and quantitative data; however, once we changed our essential question, the qualitative data provided better answers to our questions and were a better measure of boy’s interest in reading.

**Qualitative Data**
Our qualitative data were in the form of student and teacher surveys administered throughout Year 2 and Year 3. The teacher surveys required teachers to focus on classroom data and whether regular use of the reading kits was impacting students’ achievement levels for literacy. Teachers also provided feedback on boys’ general interest in reading and whether interests were impacted by the literature available to them.

The student surveys varied. We surveyed the students regularly about their reading interests to inform our purchasing of materials. It was crucial to the success of our project that students be involved in the selection process so that we addressed their various needs. We also surveyed the students to determine whether they noticed a change in their reading interests and habits, as well as what difference, if any, the regular use of the reading kits during sustained silent reading made on their academic success and interest in reading.

**Quantitative Data**

We also examined the mark distribution in ENG1P and ENG2P courses for 2004-05, 2005-06, 2006-07, and 2007-08 (Semester 1). These data indicated whether literacy skills were improving.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Quantitative Data: OSSLT Results
See graph below.
1) 2004-05 results
2) 2005-06 results
3) 2006-07 results

EQAO data shows a 12% drop over three years in OSSLT success rates for first-time eligible boys. Although the boys' frequency of reading had increased, we now need to incorporate more cross-curricular writing activities. We used this data to develop our Literacy Plan Phase II, which includes EQAO-type writing activities in all grade 9 subjects and the development of writing portfolios for all grade 9 students. The writing portfolios will consist of writing assignments from all eight courses assessed by subject teachers in relation to both curriculum content and literacy skills. The portfolios will be maintained for each student as they progress through grades 10, 11, and 12 and will assist us in monitoring our students' literacy needs and growth.

Quantitative Data: Course Mark Results

Mark distribution for boys scoring at the Provincial Level (70-79.9%) for ENG1P:
1) 2004-05
2) 2005-06
3) 2006-07

Mark distribution for boys scoring at the Provincial Level (70-79.9%) for ENG2P:
1) 2004-05
2) 2006-07
3) 2007-08 (Semester 1)

The graphs above show the percentages of males scoring at the Provincial Level (70-79.9%). The first graph shows that the percentage of grade 9 boys scoring at the Provincial Level for ENG 1P increased. The second graph shows a considerable drop in the percentage of boys scoring at Provincial Level for ENG 2P. This data, which helped us
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Qualitative Data: Student Survey Results About Reading Materials
When surveyed, our boys indicated that their preferred reading material such as email and chat-groups. Aside from computer associated reading, their preferences in order were:

Guinness Book of World Records
Sports Illustrated
Hockey
Gaming
Transworld Extreme Sports

This data assisted us in choosing materials for our Reading Kits.

Qualitative Data: Student Survey Results About Reading Kits
When surveyed about the effect the kits had on their reading skills and interest in reading, students were not able to identify that using the kits improved their reading levels or academic achievement. Many students responded that, because the material was not in the form of “books”, the reading did not improve their skills. This has helped us identify the need to educate our students on the topic of literacy in general. They would benefit from understanding that reading for information, as they do when reading magazine-type materials, is an important form of reading and is as helpful in developing their reading skills as is reading literature.

Students reported that their interest in reading increased as a result of reading materials related to their interests. Responses indicated that students were more likely to read outside of school because of the material they had read from the reading kits. Some students responded that these materials expanded their reading interests and they now pursue reading outside of school.

Qualitative Data: Teacher Survey Results
When surveyed, teachers were asked if the regular use of the reading kits during sustained silent reading increased literacy levels in their classrooms. Teachers responded that students’ marks did not change significantly; however, they were not requested to provide any information in the form of numbers. What teachers did indicate was that students were more fully engaged during class because the regular reading set the tone. Many teachers also indicated that by having interesting materials available on a regular basis, students were engaged in more on-task behaviours, which contributed to successful classroom management.
teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca  This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

This project impacted the way we collect and look at data. We began using data to inform our instructional practices, which assisted us in setting SMART goals in our school improvement plan. The entire school, teachers and students alike, has come to recognize the value of regular reading and the impact it has on reading interests and the acquisition of literacy skills.

We learned that students will read if given the opportunity and resources that are of interest to them; however, our school community, students, and teachers need a re-education about what being literate means. When reviewing the students’ feedback, most did not recognize that the reading of interesting materials is reading for literacy. Being literate does not necessarily mean you can read and recite Shakespeare or that you read novels, instead it’s about reading, appreciating, and understanding what you read, whether it is a comic, a magazine article, gaming tactics, sports statistics, or novels.
WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Guinness Book of World Records
Ripley's Believe It or Not

For professional development:
Building Student Literacy Through Sustained Silent Reading by Steve Gardiner
**Team Member Quote:**
“We now see that being literate in the 21st century may require a shift away from traditional texts and sources of literature towards more mainstream sources, especially for those who struggle to become and remain engaged. There are those who will always need Shakespeare, but there are many who want Guinness Book of World Records, Sports Illustrated, and Time!”

**Administrator Quote:**
“The use of literacy kits in our classrooms has been successful in increasing our boys' literacy level. This level is measured by the interest young men have developed in reading, their willingness to engage in reading on a daily basis, and their search for reading material outside of school hours. We are certainly pleased with this literacy initiative, despite the fact that our quantitative data may not be present to support these efforts. We look forward to continuing this initiative and developing it further to include a writing component.”

**List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:**
sustained silent reading; Reading Kits; surveys; engagement; re-education
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Huron Perth Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
St. Mary’s Catholic Elementary School – Grades JK to 8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Dave Cassone – Principal
Cathy Buchanan – teacher
Pam Haid – teacher
George Haid – teacher
Christine Hesch – teacher
Eileen Coutts – librarian
Anne Marie Petrasek – Literacy Resource Teacher, board contact
Essential Question:
“Is there a direct correlation for boys between literacy achievement and student engagement?”

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- It is essential to provide boys reading material that is related to their interests.
- The use of technology is a contributing factor to motivating and engaging boys.
- The goal setting feature of Accelerated Reader is important for boys as it gives immediate feedback and allows for “personal bests”.
- There must be an allowance for choice with respect to non-fiction text and reading response formats.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

- We began to value reading conferences, inventories, and interest surveys as viable supplements to paper-and-pencil activities and assessments.
- We found that increased and timely feedback leads to improved engagement.
- The project forced us to think of “boys” in our planning and to stretch our plans to include activities and/or resources that will promote boys’ success (e.g., “boy friendly” authors and stories). This demonstrates how we as a staff have begun to plan for “the student” not “the class” using our understanding of assessment to drive instruction.

Student Quote:
“Getting books that are interesting to boys like ones on sports or on mystery have made us want to read more often. It is important to think of what boys like before you start to recommend different books to them. Our classroom libraries are now interesting to us as readers and more of us are motivated to want to pick a book at school. It is also important to know that just because boys don’t like to read novels, does not mean they don’t like to read or can’t read.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

The refinement of our question over the time that we participated in the project speaks to “our story”. We began with a very general question.

- Will there be an improvement in reading ability and interest in reading for boys if the junior and intermediate classes provide an infusion of resources, provide more engaging activities, and use strategic teaching methods?

Over time we came to the conclusion that our essential question identified three separate areas all of which are related to student engagement. We began to see engagement as a key factor and decided to focus on the link between engagement and student achievement. Therefore, it was important that we change the essential question in order to define engagement in a broader sense to allow teachers to make decisions around programming and instruction relative to the engagement of their students, in particular their boys. Our new essential question became:

- Is there a direct correlation for boys between literacy achievement and student engagement?

Our new question allowed us to focus on a means to improve the level of engagement in our boys. We found, in particular, that choice, instant feedback, uses of technology, high interest materials, and teachers’ knowledge of the male learner all contributed to the engagement of male learners.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

- Staff will continue to use the knowledge that they have gained around assessment and professional development in their planning for rich learning experiences for boys.

- We will share our knowledge base with others through the PLC format.

- We will continue to move the lessons we have learned about engagement into our instructional activities for writing.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“It is important to us as a family when my son comes home and wants to read. We know that reading is a base for learning and we want our son not only to read but feel confident in his ability to read. Currently, he sees himself as a good reader and we want to nourish that in him.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Qualitative

- Reading conferences highlighting goal setting
  > From conference to conference, a difference in engagement can be assessed through the way the boys talk about books and, more importantly, how they view themselves as readers through their goal setting and their attitudes toward and interest in reading.

- CASI reading attitude and interest surveys

- Teacher observations
  > On-task behaviours
  > Unrequested participation
  > A willingness to be involved as evidenced by participation and positive body language

Quantitative

- CASI data
  > Measure of boys' literacy achievement

- A.R. (Accelerated Reader) data
  > A measure of growth in the ability to read increasingly difficult text
  > An indirect measure of engagement through goal setting and desire to participate.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Baseline data on the A.R. test showed that 12% of our test group of grade 3 boys, who are currently in grade 5, scored at or above grade level and no student scored significantly above grade level. After their grade 4 year, 50% of the boys scored at or above grade level with 38% demonstrating significant improvement over the course of the year. One student in particular demonstrated significant growth through this time period beginning well below grade level and ending at grade level. After the most recent test, 57% scored at or above grade level with 43% demonstrating significant growth over the course of the year.

This data demonstrates that, not only has there been consistent growth from the beginning of the project until now with our test group of boys, but they have also maintained their level of achievement when boys their age typically begin to plateau or even digress during the early junior years.

During the same time period, according to our data from teacher-student conferences, goal setting activities, teacher observations, and the CASI reading interest inventories, this cohort of boys demonstrated peaks in level of interest, perception of themselves as readers, confidence in ability levels, and personal reading frequency. This data demonstrates definitively that engagement increased as the project went on. Our data also shows that when we plan with boys in mind by providing choice, a variety of non-fiction material, and instant feedback, they are much more likely to remain engaged.

To conclude, it is appropriate to define a link between our ability to engage a cohort of boys and their capacity to achieve when it comes to literacy. Therefore, the answer to our essential question is a resounding yes — there is a direct correlation for boys between literacy achievement and student engagement.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

- We now value reading conferences, inventories, and interest surveys as viable supplements to paper-and-pencil activities and assessments. We also value them to help us shape our instruction.

- We found that increased and timely feedback leads to improved engagement.

- This project forced us to think of “boys” in our planning and to stretch our plans to include activities and/or resources that promote boys’ success (e.g., “boy friendly” authors and stories). This demonstrates how we as a staff have begun to plan for “the student” not “the class” and use our understanding of assessment to drive instruction.

- We now have an expectation that our boys will become readers. This might be considered an obvious expectation, but there were always a number of excuses that we would use to explain otherwise.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Sigmund Brouwer (Hockey Series Book), Dave Pilkey (Captain Underpants), Geronimo Stilton, Mary Pope Osborne, Tony Abbott (Secrets of Droon), Eric Walters, Matt Christopher (sports book), Eion Colfer (Artemis Fowl)
Magazines such as Sports Illustrated for Kids

For professional development:
Even Hockey Players Read by David Booth
Reading Don’t Fix No Chewys by Michael Smith and Jeffery Wilhelm
Me Read? No Way! A Practical Guide to Improving Boys’ Literacy Skills — Ontario Ministry of Education

Team Member Quote:
“Aside from reflecting upon teaching practices with my colleagues, one of the greatest impacts of this project was the injection of much needed resources into my classroom. Numerous text resources and SMART Board technology has made reading accessible to many previously reluctant male readers. By involving the students in the selection of new books for independent reading, the boys came to realize that their reading interests were valued and that their involvement in reading was an expectation. A greater variety of non-fiction texts and media texts available through the SMART Board also increased boys’ engagement in reading. Increased engagement improved reading skills, which empowered the boys further.”

Administrator Quote:
“The positive impact of this project reaches far beyond our test cohort of boys. The professional dialogue generated in our PLC’s, the purposeful planning, and shaping of instruction and the development of a belief system that our boys could be successful were all byproducts. The greatest impact, however, was the belief that the boys gained in their own abilities, realizing that, not only were they expected to become good readers, but that they were able to become good readers.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
Engagement; Accelerated Reader; SMART Board; choice; non-fiction

teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
St. Michael Catholic School ~ Grades 5-8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Barb White - Lead Teacher
Bev Byrne - Principal
Michele McGrath
Susan Brannigan-Rampp
Sheila Callaghan
Christopher Terry
Jill Gardiner
Brenda Dillon
Tara Lawrence
Sharon McNamara-Trevisan

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This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
Essential Question:
Could we improve boys’ literacy (reading and writing) through the use of gaming circles?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

• We CAN improve boys’ literacy skills (reading and writing) through the use of gaming circles.
• Hooking the learner with the use of gaming technology is a most effective springboard into literacy activities.
• Kinesthetic learners seem to be more comfortable and productive in a high-tech, hands-on environment. This type of kinesthetic learning environment, accompanied with teaching strategies, helps to close the gender gap and also improves girls’ literacy skills. We still have work to do in the area of writing.
• Scaffolding in an unconventional learning environment provides support for independent and differentiated learning opportunities.
• Cooperative learning provides learners with essential opportunities for meaningful and purposeful talk.
• Readers’ Theatre builds fluency, self-esteem and self-confidence, and develops academic communication and social skills.
• Guided Reading instruction and practice with fiction and non-fiction texts is an effective teaching strategy for junior and intermediate students.
• Multi-genre reading materials utilized in gaming centres including games, posters (both student-generated and professional) and a variety of texts are critical in helping students achieve across the curriculum. The use of visuals as a source of information for writing and as a preliminary organizer for planning and note-taking helps to improve student organization and reasoning.
• Students, especially boys, are happy to be reading material they enjoy, in an environment that they feel is

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

• As members of the PLC, we have learned to value the process of inquiry - moving from an essential question, utilizing baseline data, setting goals, applying focussed instruction, utilizing ongoing assessment tools, and reviewing the data to decide on the next steps of the project.
• It is essential to teach with a purpose and use tightly-structured, scaffolded and explicit instructional

Student Quote:
“The gaming room is a place where you can learn the way you want.”
“I like the gaming room because it is fun and doesn’t feel like you’re in a classroom or school.”
“I like the gaming room because it provides freedom. We get to be spread out and have hands-on activities.”
“The gaming room makes it much easier to feel comfortable in a learning environment. I find it much better than the classroom because it’s hands-on and independent.”

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

At St. Michael Catholic School, we have a greater number of boys than girls in the junior/intermediate panel (2:1 ratio). Initially, we created a reading pit with a “racing” theme and literacy centres in the classrooms. We noticed a marked improvement in reading scores based on EQAO data and decided we would like to make this environment accessible to all students in grades 5-8. Therefore, we created an actual literacy room with gaming to use as a springboard to literacy. We wanted to combine students’ love of technology and gaming to create a rich learning environment.

Once we received a positive response from the Ministry that we had received a grant, we experienced a great response from the school community. The parent council purchased five stand-alone, flat screen computers for the project. Schoolhouse Products Company donated over $5,000 in high-tech furniture for the techno-literacy gaming room. A representative from Thomson Nelson donated books for our reading pit in the gaming room. Students took ownership of the room environment decorate it with their self-created posters. Staff members and parent volunteers worked together to structure how the room would function based on sound pedagogical methods.

Doing action research over three years, we learned to value the process of inquiry - moving from an essential question, utilizing baseline data, setting goals, applying focussed instruction, utilizing ongoing assessment tools, and working as a PLC to review the data to decide on next steps.

The student response has been overwhelming. When students see their schoolwork as meaningful, purposeful, and important, they become self-reliant and are able to learn for themselves. The improvement in their skills has been substantiated by data results. We also have a real focus on guided reading in classrooms which is supported by the Ministry Guides to Effective Instruction.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

We want to:

• analyse the writing component of the literacy centres to enrich the tasks and improve writing results;
• continue to share our success with colleagues across our board and provincially;
• continue to use the model of utilizing data to inform instructional practices and continue to expand the model across the school community;
• continue to meet to discuss student work and maintain the model as a valued component of effective practice; and
• explore ways to extend the boundaries of the project to help students apply game-design principles and technologies to other forms of content delivery.

Parent/Guardian Quote: “The gaming room has helped my son become a strong independent student with better language skills. He has always loved video games but would only read occasionally - that is, newspaper comics and the odd magazine. I noticed that he is now reading more non-fiction from a wider variety of materials. His language marks at school have also improved. He prefers the video game component but recognizes that all the other activities are part of getting to play the video games. The end result is that his language skills are improving. I think that by changing rooms to one that looks so different from a typical classroom, the students are...”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?
DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

EQAO Gender Data ~ Reading ~ % Grade 6 Students at or above the Provincial Standard

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CASI Data - 2006-2007 - Reading Growth of Selected Students in Grades 5-8

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Report Card Data (June 2007, November 2007, March 2008) - Reading Growth of Selected Students in Grades 5-8

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<th>Low Achieving Students</th>
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<td>Mar</td>
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<td>Level 4:</td>
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EQAO Gender Data - Writing - % Grade 6 Students at or above the Provincial Standard

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Report Card Data (June 2007, November 2007, March 2008) - Writing Growth of Selected Students in Grades 5-8

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FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

EQAO Reading Data Analysis
- The percentage of girls achieving at or above the provincial standard increased by 10% and the percentage of boys achieving at or above the provincial standard increased by 19%.
- The gap between the girls’ achievement and boys’ achievement in reading decreased from 12% to 3%.

CASI Reading Data Analysis
- The percentage of low achieving students that achieved at or above the provincial standard increased by 30%.
- The percentage of medium achieving students that achieved at or above the provincial standard increased by 30%.
- The percentage of high achieving students that achieved at or above the provincial standard increased by 10%. (50% achieved at Level 4).

Report Card Reading Data Analysis
- The percentage of low achieving students that achieved at or above the provincial standard decreased by 20% in November which could be a result of the summer slouch; the learning curve of a new grade; or the fact that the Techno-Literacy Gaming Centre was not up and running until the latter part of the first term. (Due to the induction of new staff to the PLC, an initial training period had to be provided.) The percentage of low achieving students that achieved at or above the provincial standard by the March increased by 30%.
- The percentage of medium achieving students that achieved at or above the provincial standard decreased by 10% in November and increased by 10% in March. In March, 50% of these medium achieving students were achieving at Level 4.
- The percentage of high achieving students that achieved at or above the provincial standard remained the same in November and in March. In March, 70% of the high achieving students were achieving at Level 4.

EQAO Writing Data Analysis
- The percentage of girls achieving at or above the provincial standard decreased by 8% and the percentage of the boys achieving at or above the provincial standard increased by 7%.
- The gap between the girls’ achievement and boys’ achievement in writing appears to have decreased from 26% to 11%. However, considering the fact that the percentage of girls decreased in 2006-07, this discrepancy is somewhat exaggerated. We have some work to do in this area, but the increase in the boys’ achievement indicates that we are moving in the right direction.

Report Card Writing Data Analysis
- The percentage of low achieving students that achieved at or above the provincial standard remained the same in November as it was in June. There was a 10% increase in the percentage of low achieving students that achieved at or above the provincial standard by March.
- The percentage of medium achieving students that achieved at or above the provincial standard decreased by 10% in November which could be a result of the summer slouch; the learning curve of a new grade; or the fact that the Techno-Literacy Gaming Centre was not up and running until the latter part of the first term for the reasons stated above. There was a 10% increase of the medium achieving students that achieved at or above the provincial standard in March compared with November.
- The percentage of high achieving students that achieved at or above the provincial standard was 100% for the
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

We have learned to value the process of inquiry - moving from an essential question, utilizing baseline data, setting goals, applying focussed instruction, utilizing ongoing assessment tools, and working as a PLC to review the data to decide on next steps.

Professionals from other learning networks in our board have visited our school to learn about the gaming room, which has given us the opportunity to articulate our beliefs and focus our learning.

When our team made a presentation to eastern boards in Ottawa in early 2007, we grew as professionals. We worked together as a team to celebrate our successes and share our students' learning.

There is a cohesion of student learning when a division takes responsibility for divisional best practices, thereby removing the boundaries of the classroom. “It takes a village to raise a child”. All grades 5-8 students were exposed to the same project and were the vehicle for pulling teachers together to engage in and model best practices. With year-to-year transitions, this has been beneficial because we are using the same assessment tools.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Variety of Computer Games
Mainsails Series, Heinemann Primary, Harcourt Canada Boldprint, Steck-Vaughan Fluency Theatre, Scholastic X-

For professional development:
* Mosaic of Thought: Teaching Comprehension in a Reader’s Workshop* by E. Keene and S. Zimmerman
* Strategies That Work: Teaching Comprehension to Enhance Understanding* by S. Harvey and A. Goudvis
* Tools for Learning* — Arnold Publishing

Team Member Quote:
“It is the growth in learning – watching teachers employ best practices for the good of the students – that is amazing.”
“Teachers have grown as learners as much as the students, as they work along side each other.”

Administrator Quote: “It was encouraging to see teachers engaged in thinking “outside the box” to create an environment that would support our students who were struggling the most. It was gratifying to see how students responded to this environment, and how it changed their attitudes towards reading. It was uplifting to see the community and businesses join together with the school to create something new and meaningful to enhance

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
gaming; literacy; boys; technology; strategies
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Ottawa Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
St. Michael School (Fitzroy Harbour) — Grades JK-2

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Caroline Giguere-O’Rourke
Tanya Vick
Linda Pingitore
Josie Morrison
Eleanor Bishop

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
Essential Question: What effect does enhancing parental involvement have on boys’ literacy skills?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

We believe that student success is directly related to a climate of high expectations and shared responsibility among students, educators, parents, and the community. We recommend the following:

Professional Learning Communities
PLC’s are critical. Staff must work together regularly with the belief that they can effect change. A focus group should study struggling students and develop action plans.

Comprehensive Data
Early intervention is essential. Develop individual and class profiles of students’ strengths and weaknesses and re-evaluate what was been done in the previous year(s). To this end, we have recommended that our School Improvement Plan dedicate the remedial/planning and preparation time in the first month of each school year to gathering new student data.

Inform Instruction with Data
Use laser-like precision and formulate interventions from data profiles. Plans should be driven by the needs of each student and instruction should be differentiated according to the student’s zone of proximal development.

Involve Parents
It is essential to discuss children’s learning with parents and provide parents ways to support their children at home. It is fundamental to offer parents workshops and resources, as well as encouragement. In addition, inviting community volunteers into the school to work daily with struggling boys provides equitable access to regular support.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?
- We created class and student profiles and maintained an on-going assessment cycle to develop our plans of action.
- Our boys’ literacy program was a comprehensive literacy framework and provided varying levels of support in response to struggling readers. We developed a more precise intervention plan that was dynamic and responsive. We used a variety of instructional strategies and on-going assessment to differentiate instruction.
- We remained current with new pedagogical ideas, which allowed us to put research into action. We were cognizant of research on boys’ literacy and adapted our instructional practices to include approaches which are known to engage boys (e.g., kinesthetic, multimedia, manipulatives, and hands-on experimentations).
- We observed that guided, consistent, and positive support at home has a beneficial impact on student success, especially for students who are not meeting grade level expectations.
- We found that not all parents are able to contribute to their children’s learning in the same ways. In cases where additional support is needed, volunteers played an integral part in student growth.

Student Quote:
“Reading takes practice, just like hockey. You need to concentrate and try hard.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Our Plan
To create a team of parents and teachers who are committed to improving students’ literacy skills.

Highlights
Early on, we realized that we could benefit from professional development in the area of reading, so we took Reading Parts 1, 11, and 111. As well, we attended a number of workshops and conferences including Reading For The Love of It. We gathered ideas from current leaders in reading such as Debbie Millar, Tony Stead, Ruth Culham, Frank Serafini, Susan Zimmermann, David Booth, and Jeffrey Wilhelm. We were inspired! These opportunities provided us with a better understanding of reading, the process of change, and the commitment that is needed to sustain this type of undertaking. All of this, in partnership with our parents, has strengthened our resolve.

Enjoyment
We took on this challenge as a team, not as individuals. It was this collaborative work that provided individuals with the support, encouragement, and opportunities to engage in reflective practice — the heart of action research.

Challenges/Solutions
Generally, parents want to help their children do well and often need some guidance. To address this, we provided many workshops for parents. (Childcare was available.) Though we invited all parents, we specifically targeted parents of struggling students. However, despite providing workshops and logbooks (Phase 1), our struggling students’ achievement levels were not improving. Consequently, we created Phase 2 (Tackle Box and Let’s Read Programs – see page 5).

What We Learned About Our Boys/Their Responses
(1) Non-fiction is more appealing to boys than fiction; (2) graphic organizers are helpful; (3) boys like to choose how they demonstrate their learning (e.g., written, oral, and dramatic responses); (4) boys enjoy hands-on, focused literacy activities (e.g., the Tackle Boxes we used for homework) compared with more traditional paper-and-pencil tasks.

Parental Impressions
We received positive parent feedback after all the workshops. Many parents said they felt empowered and supported in their efforts to help their children learn and felt like “partners in education”. As well, parents were excited about the “Tackle Box” program because the tasks were engaging and more manageable than were Phase 1 Reading Logs.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

- Is our program too parent intensive with respect to homework? We are considering the amount of homework we give and the research on the topic. We will endeavour to streamline the home support program and be mindful of family life. We will continue to provide workshops for parents to strengthen our partnership with them.

- Are we being too ambitious regarding the amount of support that parents can provide? We will continue to recruit and train volunteers to work with students who are struggling (20 minutes a day).

- Can we sustain the amount of planning and preparation necessary to deliver our “Tackle Box” and “Let’s Read” programs? We have laid the foundations for these programs and our team is ready to commit to do whatever it takes to help our students succeed in the future.

- Can we get others on board? Yes, building school capacity is at the forefront of the ministry’s “School Effectiveness Framework”, our board’s “Essential Conditions” for student and staff success, and our “School Improvement Plan”.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“Excellent presentation at the workshop. I found I was able to clarify and get a better understanding of the comprehension strategies. The exemplars helped too and your apple analogy was great. I was able to guide my son towards achieving at Level 4 and then allow him to take it from there, using a variety of strategies.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Qualitative Data

(A) Logbook Entries
We started this initiative with a workshop for parents. Then, students were requested to read a book, respond to the text by writing a retell, and highlight the comprehension strategies that they used. Next, we developed a primary logbook rubric to guide students with grade appropriate responses. The entries were a vehicle for encouraging metacognition during reading. Logbooks were completed at home, collected on a weekly basis, and then assessed according to the rubric.

(B) Comprehensive Checklists
We used checklists during read alouds, shared, guided, and independent reading to monitor students’ knowledge and their use of reading comprehension strategies. We assessed whether students were transferring their knowledge and use of strategies to situations independent of parental one-on-one support/involvement and whether they could use the strategies as effectively at school (independently) as was evident in their home reading logbook responses.

(C) Tackle Box Program
Our logbooks needed a new face (see “Findings” on page 5 for justification). We created “Tackle Boxes” to provide activities fundamental to the development of word study, phonics, phonemic awareness, writing, retelling, as well as comprehension strategies. As outlined in Me Read? No Way! tasks that are highly structured and scaffolded with explicit instructional strategies are most beneficial for boys. We used “lures”, such as visuals, games, and props to make reading fun and engaging. The games are active, hands-on, fast paced, and involve short-term goals. Our class/student profiles were the organizational tool used to determine which “lures” went into which Tackle Boxes.

(D) Let’s Read Program
This program is a first step intervention program for struggling readers. It includes daily, intensive reading instruction for small groups of students with similar abilities. It incorporates explicit instruction in reading, writing, and phonological awareness. The classroom teacher is responsible for the programming and trained volunteers deliver the instruction.

Quantitative Data

(A) PM Benchmarks
This tool measures independent and instructional reading levels and the use of meaning, structural, and visual cues. It highlights which cueing systems and reading comprehension strategies students are/are not using.

(B) Class and Student Profiles
These profiles helped us better understand students’ needs, provide additional support, and drive our instruction. Class/student profiles provide an organizer for important classroom/student data about literacy skills. We used the following assessments: Rosner, KPAT, Yopp-Singer, PM Benchmarks, and Oral Language Assessment (MONDO).
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Phase 1: Parental Workshops and Logbooks

(A) Logbook Entries
Most of the logbook entries met the criteria as outlined in the primary logbook rubric. The rubric guidelines helped to elicit more enriched responses from our students. Before the launch of this initiative, responses were limited to simple retells and relatively unsubstantiated sharing of a student's favourite part. Within a short period of time, responses became more reflective in nature, indicating the use of strategies, and a deeper awareness of metacognitive processes. As an added benefit, students were exhibiting increased confidence in their reading and writing abilities. We saw evidence of students and parents engaged in meaningful dialogue about texts as well as discussions about reading comprehension strategies. We determined future parental workshop needs, as well as identified areas that needed to be revisited in the classroom, using the logbooks.

(B) Comprehension Checklists
Our checklists revealed that the majority of students were able to identify and apply comprehension strategies during discussions about texts read in class. Assessments completed during reading conferences and classroom observations confirmed that most students were using the comprehension strategies effectively.

(C) PM Benchmarks
In KP and grade 2, there were consistent gains in reading levels and more students met or exceeded grade expectations. However, in grade 1, though the students had progressed through some PM Benchmark levels, there was no significant growth in the expected reading outcomes (see graph below).

Phase 2: Tackle Box/Let’s Read Programs

(A) Class Profiles
By organizing, analyzing, and summarizing our data, we developed a clearer picture of the individual needs of our male students. Our profiles did not show sufficient gains for students reading below grade level. We made some important decisions based on our data. After 15 months, we came to the conclusion that boys who were struggling readers were continuing to struggle despite the use of the logbooks. We felt the need to incorporate more than just the use of reading comprehension strategies into our inquiry project. While some of our boys were struggling with the logbooks due to lack of parental involvement, we realized that others needed additional phonics, word study, etc. (Continued on next page.)

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

We had targeted higher-order reading/thinking skills through our logs when, in fact, our struggling readers needed to develop more phonological and phonemic awareness. The families of our struggling boys were not benefiting from logs in the way we had anticipated. We needed to rethink our strategy and come up with a variation of our initial idea to involve parents.

The PM Benchmark results for our struggling readers in the first two years were a cause for concern. However, in the relatively short period of time that the students were involved in Phase 2 (Tackle Box and Let’s Read programs), it is significant to note the improvement in reading levels as indicated by PM Benchmarks in the graph below. These preliminary results are extremely encouraging and show a strong justification for our mid-course adjustments.

PM Levels Achieved During Phase 2
(Tackle Box/Let’s Read Programs)

Increase in Reading Levels
March ’08 to May ’08

Gains 87%
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

Highlights

- We have become a Professional Learning Community and have experienced an increase in collaborative inquiry and a more cohesive vision regarding student learning.

- We have a stronger partnership with our parents and have found that parent involvement can be enhanced through workshops, focused intervention plans, and the provision of resources.

- We found that, in addition to home support, our daily, small group sessions with trained volunteers were effective.

Insights

- We have found that using data to develop class and student profiles is a valuable investment of time and helps to deliver meaningfully differentiated instruction.

- We are committed to action. We will reflect on our own practice through classroom action research and continue to ask, “Is what we are doing truly helping our students learn?”

- For those two students who did not make substantial gains, we will investigate further to ensure their success. We are confident they will succeed.

We sincerely appreciate the opportunity this project has provided. We have been able to explore the learning styles of our boys and effect a change and we have experienced tremendous growth as educators. Thank you for this opportunity.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
The Literacy Place (Scholastic) — many non-fiction selections
Graphic organizers; sequence charts, GO-charts, KWL charts, brainstorming webs
www.readinga-z.com
www.raz-kids.com
www.reading-tutors.com

For professional development:
What Works: Research Into Practice and Me Read? No Way! — Ontario Ministry of Education
Schools That Work by Cunningham and Allington
Ensuring Success For All Students: A Support Document for Working with Small Groups and Individual Students — Ottawa CDSB

Team Member Quote:
“The most obvious result of this endeavour is that teachers, students, and parents are working together to enrich learning. Just as ‘it takes a village to raise a child’, it takes a team to support a child’s learning.”

Administrator Quote:
“Boys will be deeply engaged in literacy activities when they are exploring a topic they are keenly interested in. Having boys explore non-fiction materials helps bridge the gap between their interests and the need for academic tasks to be purposeful and meaningful to their lives.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
Tackle Box program, Let’s Read program; parental involvement; reading; support
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Waterloo Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
St Patrick Catholic Elementary School — Grades 4-8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Joahnn Macgillivray
Chris Speisz
Adele Black
Brian Goodyear
Susan Barrett
Erika Schroeder
Leslie Schmidt
Alaine Goodacre
Shari Miller
Robert Niven
Rod Eckert
Julie Tonin
**Essential Question:** If we provide high quality resources appealing to boys and effective teaching strategies in both shared and guided reading will we improve boys’ achievement in literacy at St. Patrick?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- It is a mistake to believe that boys in general and reluctant readers in particular, do not like fiction. On the whole, boys enjoy books which place action ahead of emotion and where what the characters do is more important that what the characters think or feel. Hence, the apparent preference for the action novel. These are the equivalent of thrillers and detective stories in adult reading matter. They often come in series to help marketing.
- Boys tend to like books that match their images of themselves. They want to be able to identify themselves and what they would like to be and do. Thus, characters engaged in sport have always held at least an initial attraction for boys.
- Unfortunately, many novels with sporting action and themes fail because they do not deliver what the boy is expecting; that is, the unrealistic hope that reading the book will be just like playing the game. There is a fundamental difference between doing something and reading about it. Other boys are lost when the story does not go where they want it to go which is in a direction close to their own personal experiences. Few sport-centered novels live up to expectation.
- Boys love to have fun so they want books that are fun, make them laugh, and appeal to their sense of madcap mayhem. This is all tied up with their image of the quintessential boy and, as much as boyishness can be defined and distilled, they love to find it in the books they read. Few writers are able to capture that "boyishness" in print.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

Shared reading puts all eyes on the same text, the teacher reads aloud (modeling fluency), all students are supported in accessing the text and its meaning, explicit comprehension strategies are taught and modeled, teacher selects the purpose to meet the specific learning needs of the group, teacher chooses the text to match the purpose such as non-fiction and high interest materials, the text contains an appropriate mix of supports and challenges, the teacher and students engage in discussion to work out meaning together. Guided reading develops reading fluency, students scaffold, students monitored, comprehension enhances, and strategies are taught and increase reading attitudes and behavior. Explicit teaching outlines the purpose behind literacy activities and assists students in understanding the relevance of literacy skills to the world of work and leisure. Critical literacy assists students in exploring and understanding the gender stereotyping implicit in media and popular culture texts and enables students to develop skills to analyse the messages about gender that texts portray. This approach also allows boys to respond in ways other than from a personal dimension. A balanced literacy program includes critical literacy, in which students are taught the roles of text user and text analyst. Such approaches to literacy assist students in understanding that all texts are constructed, in learning how to read texts from a variety of viewpoints, and in developing an understanding of gender stereotypes. Many students have high levels of literacy in areas such as computer literacy that are not always recognised by schools. By ensuring that a range of texts that reflect the diverse interests of students are offered, schools can cater to the learning and needs of all students. Similarly, assessment strategies need to reflect the full range of students’ needs and interests. Assessment data can be used to determine the literacy needs of students and to develop programs that provide specific teaching and learning experiences. Teachers should work together to determine next steps for students who struggle, be more critical of the text chosen, use and reflect on assessment data to plan next steps, use qualitative data to connect texts with students, and set targets (SMART Goals). Teachers should allow boys to have a say in the selection of texts for both shared and guided reading.

**Student Quote:**

“I never knew reading and learning about things could be so much fun.”

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This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education

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**WHAT IS OUR STORY?**

Fewer boys than girls were achieving Levels 3 or 4 in our school and various data indicated that the gap was large. Boys were entering school with far fewer early literacy skills. The EQAO surveys indicated that boys didn’t spend extra time reading and ranked reading low on their preferred subjects. It is clear from the research that boys require different instructional strategies and experiences to succeed in reading. We were interested in examining how boys and girls learn and what strategies are effective in teaching boys. We reviewed *Me Read? No Way!* and information in the EQAO surveys.

Our school decided to offer boys rich and varied materials that would engage and excite them, a mixture of fiction and non-fiction in both print and electronic formats, and popular and traditional materials. By constructively addressing this issue and implementing effective strategies to address boys’ performance, we were confident that the gender gap would narrow.

Teachers are the most important factor in students’ learning. All staff used daily shared reading and guided reading experiences as the core of their reading programs. Shared reading is an important part of the reading puzzle. It is with shared reading that boys see a model and can discuss reading as a group. Direct teaching occurs in shared reading. Guided reading in small group instruction, modeling, and the teaching of specific strategies allows boys to develop comprehension strategies and deal with unfamiliar words and ideas in order to make meaning from what they read. Our goal was for boys to become strategic in their reading. By using explicit teaching strategies for comprehension, we wanted boys to develop comprehension skills. Like good readers, we hoped to see the boys use a range of strategies, interact with a variety of print, discuss in groups important information, and respond to the print in a variety of ways. We wanted boys to be confident in reading and writing and wanted to see their confidence in their comprehension and writing. We wanted boys to approach reading with excitement and confidence.

We researched and acquired current resources that were of high interest to boys for both shared and guided reading. We investigated and acquired classroom and teacher materials that supported the gender unique needs of boys. In Year 1, we focused on building awareness, competence, and resources to support the instruction of shared and guided reading in all divisions, but with a specific focus on junior and intermediate. As a staff, we examined the strategies in *Me Read? No Way!* and brainstormed how to implement them in our programs. Staff worked in collaborative groups to network with board consultants and gain knowledge and skills in both shared and guided reading with a focus on instructing boys. Staff used integrated, hands-on activities that included the use of technology. With the use of cooperative learning groups, teachers provided rich and meaningful tasks. Through ongoing assessment for learning, teachers helped students discover their confidence and successes in reading. Our continued work in a Professional Learning Community allowed all involved to continue to move towards the goal described by our essential question.

**WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?**

We will:

- focus our work in a PLC around using student work to inform our instruction and adapt our view of the boy learning across all academic areas;

- continue to look at ways in which boys learn best and build our knowledge as educators in the area of boys and literacy;

- continue to reach out to parents and offer skills and strategies to support their sons;

- connect with the community in order to provide male role models in the school to focus on literacy; and

- continue to listen to students, provide a wide range of reading materials, and make them active participants in the selection of reading materials.

**Parent/Guardian Quote:**

“The school is helping us as parents learn how to support our sons at home. We are beginning to understand that there is more to reading than our experiences in the classroom.”
### WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

**DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:**

**What Boys Think About Reading**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview survey statements</th>
<th>% of boys in agreement 2006</th>
<th>% of boys in agreement 2007</th>
<th>% of boys in agreement 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading is boring not fun</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>38.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No time for reading</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing interests me</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>45.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few books at school that I like</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>48.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a good reader</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books are too long</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to read</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>41.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a good reader</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>37.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data indicates that the boys' attitudes to reading have improved. They feel empowered and confident. They see the difference that their input into resources and books have made. They feel a sense of being connected to a class that honors them as learners.

This data was collected using a survey of all students and comparing the responses of boys and girls. Assessment data was used to create a tracking board that staff use to identify boys who were at risk. The surveys were collected once each term.

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Education

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

The more we involved boys in the selection of topics/materials for literacy programs, the more engaged they were. Boys want to be active members in providing feedback to teachers. They have a sense of worth when you take their recommendations to facilitate the purchase of materials. Boys chose reading selections that helped inform their personal interests. The students were regularly required to take books out of the library, and some of their common reading choices included “how-to” books, informational books, and fantasy. The out-of-school reading selected by these boys often supported their personal interests, such as newspapers, sports magazines, computer magazines telling them how to win at the computer games, superhero comic books, and other graphic texts. These texts were in marked contrast to their in-school selections and were not seen as appropriate for in-school reading. These richly textured literacy artifacts played a major role in these boys’ out-of-school literate lives.

Boys’ personal interest in text is related to the active emotional, mental, and physical involvement they experience and to the amount of success they experience in the engagements. Not only do they like to read and write about action, but they also want to be part of the action themselves.

Boys are often disadvantaged in academic literacy as a result of current curricular emphases, teacher texts and topic choices, and lack of availability and acceptability of texts that match their interests and needs. We found that a balance of teacher selected and student selected reading has allowed teachers to focus on explicit reading strategies through highly engaging text.

Just as factors impacting boys’ literacy are being ignored in classrooms, so are boys ignoring schooling practices that they see as boring, meaningless, and passive. As a school, we have learned that we need to change our image of reading in school to include students in selecting the texts, and make connections to relevant, meaningful issues that interest students. We must allow boys to work in collaborative groupings to talk, discuss, and scaffold their thinking before recording it in written form. We need to be careful not to over-simplify solutions that suggest we can motivate boys to read simply by introducing “boy-friendly” literature and we need to be wary of literature that serves to reinforce undesirable stereotypes for boys.

It is evident that boys can read, but are selective in what they read; they use reading strategies that they have adopted in school. As teachers we need to transform our ideas about literacy to help boys recognize their strengths. If boys can identify themselves in what they read they become engaged in their learning.

Boy-friendly classrooms – Newspaper article

‘Boys learn differently. It's not rocket science,” former principal says

LUISA D'AMATO (Oct 23, 2006)

Boys can learn to read just as well as girls, if teachers use the right approach and have the right materials. That's the somewhat revolutionary view of Rod Eckert, former principal of St. Patrick Catholic elementary school in Kitchener. Every year, with grim consistency, the Grade 3, 6 and 10 test scores from the Education Quality and Accountability Office show the same thing. Boys lag seriously behind girls in reading and writing, from the primary grades all the way to high school. Eckert -- who himself struggled to learn to read as a child and now is principal of instruction and assessment at the Waterloo Catholic District School Board -- believes that boys aren't doing as well, not because they can't but because of the way they're taught. He's joining a growing number of educators who now believe that elementary schools are run by mostly female teachers, producing a learning environment that's more friendly to the way female students learn. It's not a conscious discrimination by any means, but it essentially puts boys at a disadvantage. "Boys learn differently," Eckert said. "It's not rocket science." Just over a year ago, Eckert led a team of 12 Catholic school principals who decided to look into the research about boys and literacy. Eckert tried out some of the findings in his school and encouraged the teachers to do the same. Last spring, he applied for and got a $20,000 grant from the provincial literacy and numeracy secretariat to buy things boys would like to read. He left St. Patrick at the end of the last school year, but he said he had already started to see differences in individual boys. The accompanying boxes show some of what he found out.

(Continued in next page)
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

COMIC BOOKS AND CAR MAGAZINES Lots of boys read lots of things, but they don't really consider it "real" reading if it isn't a novel. And for many boys, a novel isn't their first choice, so they think they don't like reading. Eckert remembers talking to some of the boys at St. Patrick, and watching them intently reading a catalogue at lunch that detailed tips, tricks and ways to "cheat" at certain video games. "I said, 'Was that not reading?' They said, 'We were reading, but that's not reading.' " Eckert had a look at the catalogue himself and was amazed at how difficult it was for him, with its unfamiliar vocabulary. Though he has several university degrees, he "was struggling to make meaning of what was in front of me," he said. But when he saw how interested the boys were, Eckert knew what to do. He picked up comic books and "graphic novels," including one on Louis Riel that was gobbled up by the Grade 7 history class. "They all knew about Louis Riel before they started studying" because the book was so popular. For the library, Eckert also bought magazines like Car & Driver, sports magazines and Power magazine, which is designed for Grades 4 to 6 and offers short stories, factual information and poetry on a popular subject each issue, such as skateboarding or natural disasters. The strategy is working. Reading these materials "is easy, and it doesn't take as long" as a novel, said Jordan Braniff, who is in Grade 7 at St. Patrick. Eckert also bought books for the kids who need special education: If a Grade 6 student is reading at a Grade 3 or 4 level, he or she doesn't want to read Grade 3 or 4 books because the themes are too babyish. It's "humiliating," Eckert said. So he bought specially written but easy-to-read books on the subjects the students were interested in. Overall, Eckert says, it's easier to get boys to cheerfully read something you want them to read -- like a novel -- if you have other things in the classroom that interest them.

BOYS NEED TO MOVE Let boys act out a story, and they can recall it and discuss it much better than if they only read it first. Some teachers know this instinctively, like the science teacher at St. Patrick who has kids move around and "act out" what it's like to be part of a molecule. Eckert, like many good teachers, learned in his classroom that some boys really need to move around while they're learning. "Girls are content to sit at a desk and complete their work," he said. "Boys aren't like that. It takes a lot of self-control (to sit still). We're confining them to this desk." Eckert recalled a situation involving a young boy in a Grade 5 and 6 class. Eckert was unhappy with the boy because "he was constantly out of his desk, interfering with other kids' learning. I didn't have patience. "He wanted to do his math standing up." But one day, when Eckert realized how miserable both he and the young boy were, he decided to move him to the side of the class, where he wouldn't distract other kids, and let him stand. The boy was happy and got on with his work. If students are allowed to turn something they've read into a drama, perhaps performing it for the younger kids, the boys retain it much better -- and Eckert thinks part of that has to do with the physical movement involved.

SMALL GROUPS, NOT THE WHOLE CLASS Asking a child to read aloud in front of the class can be agony for a struggling reader, Eckert says. "It's a practice I don't like to see." Instead, he suggests to teachers they break up the class into small groups and have them read together, or study some text and look up unfamiliar words. "In the small group, it's less risky, less scary for boys." Eckert was also interested to note that the research shows boys write better about a passage they've read if they can discuss the ideas first. It's not that boys don't have ideas, but often "they don't know how to group their thoughts," and the discussion helps them with that.

PLASTIC EAVESTROUGH Boys and girls act differently when they're choosing a book they'd like to read. Most girls will pick out a book on a shelf and read the summary on the back cover to help her decide whether she's going to read it. But boys aren't so patient, Eckert's research has shown. They won't read that summary. They need to see the cover, and the cover determines whether they want to read the book. So the library needs to show plenty of tempting books, not lined up on a shelf but displayed with the cover showing. Eckert remembers when he was a young teacher in the 1990s at St. Joseph School in Preston. He bought plastic eavestroughing because it was cheap, and he needed storage in his classroom. The eavestroughing was the perfect holder to show off books standing up, cover outward. He didn't even know at the time that this helped get boys enthusiastic about a book.

PRAISE THEM Eckert had a Grade 2 child once who was anxious and self-conscious, and whose writing "was so sketchy you couldn't make sense out of it." But that child was sent to Eckert, then the St. Patrick's principal, by his teacher to show off a sentence he'd written that -- for the first time in the child's life -- made sense. Eckert told the boy that if he came back with a story from that sentence, he could read it on the public address system to the whole school. He knew that writing for a purpose, for an audience, is more meaningful. The boy chose a classmate to help him and they came back with 25 pages. Eckert made good on his promise and the two boys read their story one morning. The Grade 8 students burst into applause for the two boys, who "were beaming" at the recognition from the older kids. "It was the finest moment of the whole St. Patrick’s year," Eckert said. "I said (to the Grade 8s), 'You just did the most positive thing in this school.' "

WHAT THEY READ Percentage of Grade 10 students who say they do these activities outside school: Reading: E-mail and instant messaging: Boys 90 per cent; girls, 94 per cent; Magazines: Boys 70; girls 87 ; Newspapers: Boys 58; girls 54; Comics: Boys 45; girls 37; Religious material: Boys 20; girls 23; Manuals and instructions: Boys 52; girls 34; Novels, fiction, short stories: Boys 57; girls 80; Song lyrics and poems: Boys 51; girls 77.

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

Teachers can use their assessment data to determine the literacy needs of their students and develop programs that provide specific teaching and learning experiences for those groups of students who need support to improve their literacy skills.

A balanced literacy program will include critical literacy, where students are taught the roles of text user and text analyst (see Teaching Reading: a K-6 Framework, pages 12-13). Such approaches to literacy assist students to understand that all texts are constructed, to learn how to read texts from a variety of viewpoints, and to develop an understanding of gender stereotypes.

Teachers work together to determine next steps for students who struggle, are more critical of the text chosen, focus on the school or division not the individual class, use and reflect the reading assessment data to plan for next steps, use qualitative data to connect text with the student, and set goals or targets (SMART Goals) for class/division and school.

Teachers allow boys to have a say in the selection of text for both shared and guided reading.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- Bold Print
- Power Zone
- Junior level Big books

For professional development:
- Boys, Literacy, and Popular Culture by Thomas Newkirk
- Even Hockey Players Read by David Booth
- Me Read? No Way! — Ministry of Education

Team Member Quote:
“As we continue to refine our practice of reading instruction that honors the boys in the school, we will continue to see a shift in boys’ attitudes about reading. Teachers must be purposeful in their instruction and explicitly teach reading strategies. Using shared and guided reading as the vehicle to engage boys, we continue to learn from the students and respond to their needs. Providing materials that interest boys and instruction that allows them to think out loud and discuss their reading with peers has led to improvement in the boys’ writing.”

Administrator Quote:
“This project has been outstanding for the staff and in turn our boys. I has begun not only discussions about instructional strategies among teachers but also opened the communication with parents and students. We have boys talking about what they read — they are engaged. Their confidence has grown. The greatest development has been with the staff. Their increased knowledge base and collaborative efforts to problem solve and support each other has been remarkable.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
shared reading; quality materials; guided reading; talk; action
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Atikokan Roman Catholic Separate School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
St. Patrick’s School – Junior Kindergarten to Grade 8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Mrs. Karen Clement – Junior Kindergarten and Music teacher
Mrs. Lila Bujold – Senior Kindergarten teacher
Mrs. Diane Bowes – Grade 1 teacher
Mrs. Gail Gouliquer – Grade 2 teacher
Mrs. Ruth Ivall – Grade 3 teacher
Mr. Guy Durand – Vice Principal and Grade 8
**Essential Question:** How to get boys to **want** to read and write, as opposed to **having** to read and write?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

**Primary Division**

1. It is important to have a wide variety of materials such as high interest-low vocabulary texts, leveled books, and book sets. 
2. Financial support is essential because these materials are very costly. 
3. Teacher release time is important for training and implementation of new strategies. 
4. Collaboration among colleges is also essential for success.

**Junior Division**

1. Modeling reading and writing helps the weaker student understand reasoning and rationale. 
2. Activating prior knowledge helps to motivate boys. 
3. Author visits engage students through questioning and encourages them to read novels. 
4. Professional reading helps educators be more focused and knowledgeable about a topic. 
5. Learning Profiles/Multiple Intelligences can be used to encourage boys to plan a variety in activities and try different types of learning activities. 
6. Book sharing is an effective strategy because students enjoy presenting books they read orally to the class, using different strategies such as designing a poster, conducting interviews, or giving drama performances they create based on the books they read.
7. Literacy circles are effective because through the shared oral discussions and the facilitation of groups, the boys are encouraged to read and think about what they read. 
8. Guided reading is acceptable, but the activities students participate in must be well structured with clear routines. Books must be selected based on level and some books work better for teaching certain strategies than others. 
9. Reading ‘Buddies’ for young students paired with older students can be effective for some students (e.g., a read aloud session). 

**Intermediate Division**

1. Boys need choice in topics or tasks so they can demonstrate their learning in ways that suit their abilities and interests. 
2. It is important to review often and use a variety of hands-on approaches. 
3. Boys seem competitive in nature, therefore it is important to challenge them. One successful approach is to place them in a group of students with higher expectations and because some boys do not want to be outdone, their own standards and performances are raised.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

**Primary Division**

1. When materials match boys’ abilities and interests, they will read and succeed. 
2. Our assessment practices have helped drive our instruction. We have focused on strengths, weaknesses, and next steps suggested by our assessment tools.

**Junior Division**

1. After instruction, provide opportunities for students to model for their peers (e.g., writing an effective sentence). 
2. Provide students with structured choices for demonstrating their learning. 
3. Keep a list of books and texts that are appropriate for instruction. 
4. Provide books that contain illustrations and visuals. 
5. Maintain a bibliography of books that students enjoy. 
6. Librarians should provide a listing of new resources on a regular basis. 
7. Conduct informal assessments with individual students so reluctant readers feel more comfortable to read and share their understandings with others.

**Intermediate Division**

1. Provide boys with choices and they become more accountable for their learning and work. 
2. Conduct in-class discussions about how boys and girls learn so they both understand their differences. 
3. Include magazines in areas that interest boys such as motorcycles, driving, and the outdoors. These magazines lead to many interesting discussions and help boys read and develop their oral communication skills.

**Student Quote:**

teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Our primary division was very excited to be part of the Boy’s Literacy Project. We held many committee meetings to discuss our action plan and came up with several components, including:

- scheduling/hosting an author visit for parents and staff as well as workshops for the students;
- ongoing professional development;
- purchasing professional resources;
- purchasing student reading material (high-interest/low vocabulary and non-fiction);
- purchasing and building listening centers in all classrooms; and,
- purchasing computer related software.

We also began an achievement inventory for each grade to track student growth over time. The data included CTBS scores, DRA reading levels, and reading and writing grades from the Ontario Provincial Report Card.

Our greatest enjoyment came from the success our boys experienced when reading the new books! They devoured these books in the classroom and in the library, and wanted to read! The boys were often the last to put their books away at tidy-up time! Larry Schwartz visited our school and the visit was excellent. The children were entertained, engaged, and motivated to write after the visit. Teachers and parents enjoyed his words of wisdom and thanked him for his superb recommendations for book titles.

Our greatest challenge was fulfilling our entire plan by the end of the three-year project. We had a late start (third term of the first year), the second year was very limited in terms of grant money, and by the third year some of the interest and passion for this project was running thin. With the addition of new and different staff members, the original plan became somewhat altered to meet their needs and interests.

The parents seemed generally pleased with the program. They immediately noticed the new books in many of the classrooms. Some parents expressed their excitement that their sons were “finally reading” and were now “such good readers!”

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

Primary Division
We will continue to use the great literature we purchased as well as implement the new teaching strategies we developed. We also recommend that the ministry raise parent awareness and provide them with materials about literacy and attitudes regarding school. We will continue to look and ask for print material that covers the entire curriculum and beyond so children understand that literacy is life long and essential for everything.

Junior Division
We will have the librarian introduce a new book with a brief synopsis or introduction to the author and include other titles by the author. We will keep an updated bibliography of new resources in the library. We will have a monthly subscription to various magazines and purchase audio books to accompany novel study and curricular work. We will consider audio taping community members reading books for kids to read. We will develop a Book Bag Reading Room for the whole school.

Intermediate Division
We will develop strategies to build on the interest in reading and extend them so boys will want to push themselves further and demonstrate improvement through personal challenge. The boys sometimes get so involved in the enjoyment of the assignment that they forget to challenge themselves to grow and improve their skills.

General
We need to develop a continuum of Language Skills: Scope and Sequence to assist students with an IEP. We will improve PLC development in order to share classroom successes in literacy.
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

We collected and tracked data for three years from provincial report cards, EQAO assessments, the Canadian Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), and the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). The DRA provided students’ reading levels. Teachers in grades 1-6 administered the DRA at least twice each year, while grades 7 and 8 teachers administered it once a year, in the fall. The CTBS has a reading component and various other language components and provides a total language score which we used to determine writing results. The EQAO tests provided reading and writing scores. We tracked the provincial report marks for reading and writing.

Year One was our baseline, starting point. We tracked the boys in grades 1-6 for three years by compiling the data into six sets of data sheets. The set of graphs below is for boys who were in grade 1 in 2005-06.

Boys in Grade One in 2005/2006
Data Summary 2006 – 2008

Note 1: Grades are indicated as C- is 1 up to A+ is 12
Note 2: Marks for 2008 are for March as this report was due to the ministry in May.

Note: CTBS has no reading component in grade 1.

Note: For DRA levels in Primary Kit,
- Grade 1 is “Early Readers”, levels 3-6 and 8-10
- Grade 2 is “Transitional Readers”, levels 12-16 and 18-24
- Grade 3 is “Extending Readers”, Levels 28-34 and 38-44
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Data for boys who were in grade 2 in 2005-06 are shown in the graphs below:

Boys in Grade Two in 2005/2006
Data Summary 2006 – 2008

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Note: For DRA Levels in Junior/Intermediate Kit,
- Grade 3 - “Extending”, levels 64-65, 66-69, and 70-73
- Grade 4 - “Intermediate”, levels are 74-75, 76-79, and 80-83
- Grade 5 - “Advancing Intermediate”, levels are 84-85, 86-89, and 90-93
- Grade 6 - “Middle Schools”, levels are 94-95, 96-99, and 100-103
- Grade 7 - “Extending Middle School”, levels are 104-105, 106-109, and 110-113

The following are the numbers of boys in each grade:
- Grade 1 – 8 boys followed through Grades 1-3
- Grade 2 – 8 boys followed through Grades 2-4
- Grade 3 – 10 boys followed through Grades 3-5
- Grade 4 – 14 boys followed through Grades 4-6
- Grade 5 – 7 boys followed through Grades 5-7
- Grade 6 – 4 boys (increases to 5 the following year) followed through Grades 6 – 8

The small numbers in each grade impacted our reflections about the data so we looked at personal gains made in each group.
This literacy initiative is one of many changes that have been taking place in our school related to literacy. The resources, planning, and special events made possible by the funds provided by this project have had a very positive effect. The benefits extended to our JK and SK programs and the results we are seeing in our present grades 1 and 2 students are very promising.

This initiative has proven to us that early interventions and the provision of opportunities for authentic reading and writing develop skills that will benefit boys for a lifetime and was evident in the group of boys we tracked through grades 1, 2, and 3. Data from the report cards, DRA, and CTBS reflect that there are no serious concerns for these students—the boys are progressing well. Only two boys are performing just below grade expectations in reading and three are performing just below grade expectations in writing as measured by DRA and CTBS; however, report cards reflect that all boys are performing at or above grade level expectations. Our current grade 2 class has one student just below grade expectations in writing (CTBS). DRA, CTBS and report card information places none of the boys below grade expectations in reading and the report card places none of the boys below grade expectations in writing. Therefore, the work we are doing in JK, SK and grades 1, 2 and 3 looks very promising.

The results and observations for the remaining groups are as follows:

The grade 2 group of eight boys, tracked through grades 2, 3, and 4 has shown very limited improvement. Two of the boys have an IEP. Report cards indicate that none of the boys have severe difficulties (i.e., no D’s or R’s), but four boys are performing just below grade level in reading and two in writing. CTBS, EQAO, and DRA assessments indicate that four boys are performing below grade expectations in reading and five in writing. We feel the discrepancy may be due to the format of the DRA, CTBS and EQAO assessments. The boys seem to put more effort into classroom activities, which they find more interesting and provide them with more choice.

The grade 3 group of 10 boys, tracked through grades 3, 4, and 5, has one boy with an IEP. The EQAO results indicate that two boys are performing below grade level in reading and five in writing. The latest CTBS results indicate that no boys are performing below grade level in reading and four are performing below grade level in writing at the beginning of the year. Report card marks reflect that three boys are below grade level in reading and eight are below grade level in writing.

The grade 4 group of 14 boys is our largest group. We tracked them through grades 4, 5, and 6. Two boys have an IEP. Report card marks over the three years reflect that the number of boys performing below grade level in reading decreased from five to two and only two boys were performing below expectations in writing this year. EQAO results indicate that seven boys were performing below grade expectations in reading and five in writing. DRA results indicate that four boys were performing below reading expectations. The CTBS results indicate that two boys improved from below average to average in reading and writing.

The grade 5 group of seven boys, tracked through grades 5, 6, and 7, has shown limited improvement. They are in a class with 17 girls. Three of the boys have an IEP. CTBS data shows that two boys improved in reading and one boy improved in writing. All other indicators illustrate no significant change.

The grade 6 group of four boys (one new student in grade 7), tracked through grades 6, 7, and 8 has shown some improvement. Three of the boys have an IEP. CTBS, DRA, and report card data reflect that one boy improved in reading and writing. Two boys remained below grade level in reading and four remained below in writing.

Therefore, we have come to the following conclusions:

- This initiative has had a very positive impact on our primary boys. We are anticipating that the skills they have developed, along with their positive attitudes to reading and writing, will continue through the junior and intermediate years.
- Changing negative attitudes towards reading and writing becomes increasingly difficult as boys get older, thus making skill development very challenging.
- Boys that do not want to read and write have difficulties completing assessments such as CTBS, DRA, and EQAO. They tend not be interested in the reading selections in these assessments and find the writing components dissatisfying. On the other hand, boys who are more engaged in reading and writing are more likely to improve.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

The inquiry project had the following impact on us as educators:

(1) The DRA assessments have had a significant impact in guiding our instruction and assessment.

(2) We discovered that author visits encourage students to read. They are very powerful.

(3) We found that boys seem to enjoy non-fictional texts with pictures. Graphic novels are a new trend.

(4) The project funds helped provide resources (books, magazines, software, etc.), professional development, and time to meet to discuss best practices and share ideas. We are more determined now to maximize our use of the textbook budget to enhance our language programs.

We are looking forward to well-structured professional development to share experiences and discuss future developments in the areas of literacy and numeracy.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
High-interest/low vocabulary print materials
A variety of genre (e.g., magazines, non-fiction, graphic novels, posters) that address the local interests of boys (e.g., forestry, machines, dirt biking, outdoors, Dads)
These resources should not only be in the library, but in the classrooms as well.

For professional development:
Quality professional development delivered by dynamic guest speakers and authors
High-interest/low vocabulary print materials with teaching guides
Ministry “Differentiated Instruction” resource kit – differentiated instruction cards (easy access, many choices)

Team Member Quote:

Administrator Quote:

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
author visits; choice; high-interest magazines; listening centres; achievement inventories
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Peterborough Victoria Northumberland Clarington Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
St. Paul School – Grade 5

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Mitch Champagne
Lisa Cossar
Mike Neundorf
Craig Watkins

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
**Essential Question:** Will the attitudes and skills in reading and writing for a class of 20 male students improve over time when they are: (1) given more opportunities to incorporate technology into their literacy program, (2) given more choice and selection in their reading materials and topics for writing, and (3) provided with male role models in their literacy program?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

**Teacher Inquiry and Teacher Learning Community**

Our most important finding is our realization of the great benefits that can come from teacher inquiry. At the start of the project, we found ourselves delving into new territories in our individual teaching practices. Many of us were not comfortable with technology. However, the team bounced ideas back and forth and we began to feel more comfortable with the technological tools.

We highly recommend that schools have strong teacher learning communities. At St. Paul, we have moved beyond our comfort zones in order to implement the most effective teaching strategy for each individual student.

**Choice**

Differentiated instruction is important because it is vital that boys and girls have choice in how they demonstrate their knowledge. Because most boys seem to want to do their reading or writing on a screen, access to technology is paramount. As teachers, we must also understand students’ strengths and mold their lessons to meet the needs of every type of learner. All teachers at St. Paul now value technology as an essential teaching tool.

**Let Them Talk**

A structured classroom that allows boys the opportunity to discuss with one another what they read or write leads to better understanding of the materials. We now encourage our students to discuss their reading – “silent reading” has now become “read and discuss”.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

With the purchase of new resources and technology, we had the opportunity to try new instructional practices. The resources became a catalyst for changing the rigidity of our language programs.

As we discussed the data we collected through the project, along with our focus on differentiated instruction, it became clear that students were able to demonstrate their knowledge of an expectation when the method fit their strengths and interests.

The atmosphere of our classrooms changed in this project. Our delivery of lessons became much more centered on allowing students to “talk” to ensure understanding of the setting, characters, and important information of texts, rather than using “whole group discussions”. We allowed the students to dramatize, illustrate, use various computer programs, and give oral presentations when it came time to demonstrate their knowledge of texts.

We delivered our lessons very differently — we gave the boys ample time to discuss with their classmates and we allowed them choice in how they demonstrate their knowledge.

**Student Quote:**

“I feel that using a projector, computer, and SMART Board makes me a better reader and writer because it makes lessons fun, unlike looking at a chalkboard.” — **Grade 5 male student**

“When I use a computer or a SMART Board alone or with the class, I feel more confident. I love using the SMART Board and computer because they make learning fun.” — **Grade 5 female student**
**WHAT IS OUR STORY?**

Three years ago, we were very excited with the opportunities that were presented to us through this project to support our teaching practices. The money that we received kicked off the discussion, “What resources should be purchased to enhance the boys’ learning?” As we were using the publication *Me Read? No Way!* as a guide to purchase materials such as graphic novels, informational text, data projectors, leveled readers, and other resources, our thinking began to shift to how we should and could change our Language program.

During the project, we realized that the focus of the Board’s professional development opportunities seemed to directly correlate with our goals and supported our project. These opportunities included workshops on differentiated instruction, technology, new language resources such as Nelson Literacy and Boldprint, the introduction of Literacy Coaches in our school, and an Integrated Literacy Program. Now, not only we teachers at St. Paul were discussing successes and failures about “boy friendly” lessons, but all teachers in the board were involved.

As the project progressed, we began to feel more comfortable implementing the Language resources, using strategies such as literature circles, Reader’s Theatre, and implementing more graphic organizers to help the boys in their reading and writing. However, we wanted to use more technology in our classrooms. Led by the grade 3 teacher who had 17 boys in the class that year, we sent an application to our Board to obtain a laptop grant. The Board supported us for our project by providing this particular class with the grant for three consecutive years.

Our focus on technology began to grow as we saw success in this class, and eventually technology became the sole focus of our project. More resources such as SMART Boards, digital cameras, data projectors, and opaque projectors, were being used successfully in this classroom. The learning that was taking place in the class also permeated throughout all other grades in our school. Teachers became much more confident, and students became much more willing to share the use of technology in the classroom.

**WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?**

To continue our success, we need to:

- focus on teacher inquiry, not only as a necessity for this project, but as a practice we consistently utilize to meet our children’s needs and expand our teaching strategies;

- continue our focus on the use of technology and continue to feel comfortable with implementing technology in the classroom;

- continue to share ideas and resources pertaining to technology in our classroom, as technology is ever changing; and

- focus on differentiated instruction as a key planning tool when assessing student work.

**Parent/Guardian Quote:**

“I think the use of technology has benefited our son in reading and writing because it is engaging and motivating. Our son is very interested in computers and the opportunity to use a computer regularly focuses his learning. In addition, using a computer requires a set of specific skills that can be applied in everyday life.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

To answer our essential question, we gathered various forms of qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative data included PM Benchmark and Diagnostic Reading Assessment scores, that we later translated into grade levels. We also tracked reading and writing marks from the report cards. Qualitative data included Multiple Intelligence Surveys and Attitudinal Surveys. Each data collection system helped us plan future meetings to reflect on lesson delivery and whether our lessons were meeting the needs of our students and what would be the next steps for our delivery of the curriculum.

We feel that our collection of Multiple Intelligence Survey data was a factor in improving the skills of our grade 5 boys. By looking at this data, we were able to group students according to similar strengths. Therefore, when they worked together, each member of the group was responding to a problem in a way that they enjoyed, and with people that shared the same interests. Also, we geared our lessons to these specific groups, allowing the groups to choose assignment that played to their strengths for expressing their knowledge. The groupings and opportunities for choice could have played a vital role in the improved attitudes over the life of the project.

We considered the responses from the Attitudinal Survey and focused on the students who did not show a positive attitude. We then implemented the following strategies: (1) we moved them into another group, (2) we allowed them to access more computer time, and/or (3) we gave them a greater variety of reading material. Quite often, if a student stated that he or she was not reading at home, we would choose a book that might interest the student, by matching the book with information from the Multiple Intelligence Survey.

Our collection of marks for writing from the report cards helped considerably. Because our lessons revolved around the use of technology, students became adept at the features of such programs as Inspiration, Word Q, and WordPerfect. The students were excited to write using the technology and were producing published products with little difficulty. After a closer look at the data, it became clear that the overall class grades were dropping. After an even closer look into what was being marked and trends in student work, we noted that the area of conventions was proving to be challenge for students. Our team then decided to focus on the area of conventions in writing as a goal for our School Improvement Plan.

Our analysis of report card marks for reading indicated that allowing students various ways to exhibit knowledge was leading to higher skill levels among the grade 5 students. We were very pleased to see that the students who were once performing at Level 2 were achieving at Levels 3 or 4. The graphic novels, informational texts, and new Language programs that are full of differentiated strategies have benefited these students greatly. We continue to focus on the students performing at Levels 1 and 2 by increasing computer access, increasing choice in what they read, and increasing choice in how they may demonstrate understanding.

All of these data gathering methods have proven to be helpful to us as we planned for student success.

We have found that data is a great catalyst for teacher inquiry discussions.

We have also found that technology and differentiated instruction can indeed help to improve students' skills and attitudes in the areas of reading and writing.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Our data shows that our team had some success improving the attitudes and skills of male students in our 2007-08 grade 5 class. The Diagnostic Reading Assessment (DRA) and writing and reading report card marks gave us quantitative data while student quotes, Multiple Intelligence Surveys, and Attitudinal Surveys provided qualitative data.

The data in the chart to the right tracks the PM Benchmark scores for the grade 5 class. The numerical values represent grade levels. The data does not necessarily show much improvement for the boys. In 2006, close to 69% of the boys were at grade level, compared with 56% in spring 2008. However, we feel that the assessment is structured in a way that does not allow any differentiated choices for the students and may be hindering the ability of the boys to demonstrate complete understanding of the text. The boys that usually do not perform well in “pencil and paper” assignments, did not perform to grade level in this assessment. Hence, these results and the structure of the assessment supported our opinions about giving boys choice in their assignments. Teachers need to give further thought about providing alternative ways for students to answer assessment questions.

It was valuable to delve deeper into the particulars of the holistic grade in the DRA. We came to understand where each individual student might improve. For example, scores for the Inferring and Metacognitive Awareness sections of the test were low for most students and we therefore made them areas for greater focus in our School Improvement Plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>05/06</th>
<th>06/07</th>
<th>07/08</th>
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<tr>
<td>Term</td>
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<td>06/07</td>
<td>07/08</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student B</td>
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<td>Student I</td>
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<td>Student J</td>
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<td>Student P</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Q</td>
<td>2 2</td>
<td>Na 2 2</td>
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</table>

The chart on the left tracks the report card marks for reading for the sample class from grade 3 to grade 5. The numbers in the shaded regions indicate the achievement levels. We believe that these levels are very indicative of the success students can experience when they are offered choice and technology.

Students, F,H,M and Q have all improved from level 2 to levels 3 or 4. However, some students did achieve at lower levels. As a team, we must look at these students and ask ourselves if we have given these students opportunities to express their knowledge in ways that are relevant to them.

Our base line data in term 2 of 2006 shows that 70.5% of the students were achieving level 3 or higher. Data for term 2 of 2008, shows that close to 87% are achieving level 3 or above.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

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</table>

The above graph tracks the report card marks for writing. The numbers in the shaded areas indicate the achievement levels for the sample class from grade 3 to grade 5. The data indicates that many students improved their writing skills; namely, students A, G, H, K, and M. Students’ use of laptops greatly improved achievement in the areas of conventions, word choice, and sentence fluency, and helped students improve the planning and publishing stages of writing. However, when tested on conventions without the aid of a technological tool, students’ grades did decrease. The team has recognized this, and is discussing alternative ways to improve the area of conventions in writing. Our baseline data shows that 76% of students were achieving at least level 3. By the time the class was in grade 5, 73% were achieving level 3.

The Attitudinal Survey data shown in the table to the right indicates the statements that students responded to as, No, Sometimes, and Yes. The percentages of students who answered “Yes” are shown in the table. This survey allowed us to identify the students who did not have a “positive” attitude towards reading or writing. We offered these students different choices, a wider range of texts, and even more computer time in order to help them achieve success. As the percentages indicate, the attitudes of the boys certainly became more positive over the course of the project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Recent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am a good reader</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I read at home</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use a computer to read</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to read</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a good writer</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use a computer to write</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to write</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, we collected additional qualitative data through the means of Multiple Intelligence surveys. These data gave us a better understanding of students’ strengths and interests. We found this information valuable for planning instructional lessons or grouping students with similar strengths and interests. The Multiple Intelligence surveys categorized the students as being kinesthetic, verbal linguistic, logical mathematical, spatial, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, or naturalist.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

The inquiry project has had an invaluable impact on us.

Prior to the inquiry project, we were focused on our individual classrooms and the programs we were implementing. Discussions around classroom practices, successes and failures, and new ideas took place but were not focused.

During the inquiry project, the communication between grades and divisions increased dramatically. Staff meeting time became devoted to boys and literacy and gave us a focal point for discussions. Individually, we were each very comfortable sharing successes and failures with the team. We each utilized our individual strengths to support others in unique ways when strategies were deemed to be out of individual comfort zones. The sharing of resources and new ideas among our team members enhanced the quality and effectiveness of our lessons.

One significant impact of the project has been that we now feel comfortable seeking help from each other to resolve individual challenges — we are now willing to experiment with and share new ideas.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
www.readwritethink.org
www.quia.com/web

For professional development:
Even Hockey Players Read. Boys Literacy and Learning by David Booth
www.teach-nology.com

Team Member Quote:
“The technological learning curve that I have been on the past three years has taken me places I never imagined possible in my teaching practice. The opportunity to use differentiated instruction to magnify individual talents, has not only taught me different strategies to use in my classroom, but it has also given me a deeper understanding of each student’s capabilities and personality.”

Administrator Quote:
“Our Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project has been successful. For three years, staff members have worked diligently, as a collaborative learning team, to facilitate change in teaching practices, including: incorporating technology more effectively into lesson planning and delivery, more regular use of differentiated instruction techniques, and ensuring that students have more opportunities for “structured” talk. These changes in practice have, as our data indicates, led to substantive improvement in two key areas: boys' literacy skills and boys' attitudes to literacy. We are optimistic that we can continue to work together to apply our “lessons learned” with boys…and girls.”

List five ($) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
technology; differentiated instruction; teacher inquiry; choice; let them talk
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Northeastern Catholic DSB

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
St Paul School — Grade 4-6 students

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
John D’Alessandri — Principal
Tom Hudon — Grade 6 teacher
Valerie Koroschetz — Grade 6 teacher
Essential Question: Will improved access to engaging and relevant reading materials impact on junior division boys' attitudes towards and motivation to read, and ultimately improve their achievement in reading?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

We had a complete turn around in staff this year and it was difficult to continue in depth with the inquiry project. The two grade 6 teachers are new to the school and began in late October.

The most obvious finding from our project was that books directed at boys' interests increases their willingness to read and share their thoughts about their reading. We have been diligent over the last three years, including this year, about stocking our library and in-class libraries with books that boys enjoy and find relevant to their lives.

It is obvious from observations we made on a daily basis that our boys have found the books that we have specifically targeted for them and they are reading these books when they have time allotted in the classroom setting.

Teachers are also attempting to incorporate read alouds and other readings that are of greater interest to our male readers (for example, the book entitled Among the Hidden and picture books that have social justice themes such as The Harmonica).

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

We embarked on a couple of critical pathways this year. We first used Lily and the Paper Man to create our culminating activity. After some discussion, we realized that our boys may benefit more from a different type of book and we created our next path around The Harmonica.

One teacher worked on literature circles and we used the abridged version of Treasure Island to help two male readers access the text that they would not otherwise have been able to access.

Our teachers are increasingly cognizant of providing relevant material to our students in order to increase engagement in the classroom. This will continue to be an area of focus for us, as proper reading materials and questions that boys are comfortable answering will lead to more success in the classroom for all students.

Student Quote:
"I enjoy reading adventure books and non-fiction history books. I would like to see even more history books in our collections."
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

We are in the final year of a three year project. We have experienced considerable change with a new principal and two new grade 6 teachers beginning in late October. We are a Turn Around school and therefore release time for PLC’s is available for all teachers.

According to the reports and observations for the first two years of the project, it is obvious that the focus was to increase the number of books and resources for our male readers. We are a school with a significant population of students with special needs as well as a high number of aboriginal students. Over one-half of the staff is in their first four years of teaching, while the remainder has five to 30 years of experience.

This year, we focused on our students’ writing skills and instituted a school-wide focus on “Better Answers”. As well, we have used the boys’ literacy project and our Turn Around experience to enhance our practices for all students. We have attempted to bring in resources to engage our male readers at all levels from JK to grade 6. We intend to continue to improve in this area, expand our use of the resources we have, and look for new resources that can help us in our quest to improve.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

Our next steps will be to continue to look for resources and strategies that will enhance the literacy lives of our male students, while not ignoring our female students.

We will continue to work on critical pathways, always with an eye to incorporating questions and texts that our male readers will find interesting.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“I have noticed that my son has read a vast number of adventure books including the entire Alex Rider collection. He also enjoys non-fiction works, such as hockey biographies and others.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

We will be completing our Gates Mcguintie testing and the results will be forwarded. We will also forward results from the CASI assessment.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

The inquiry project forces us to reflect on what types of materials we are using in the classroom. Boys can be reached with a variety of fiction and non-fiction works and it is crucial that we have as many different resources as possible to create a learning environment that is conducive to success.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- Bone series
- Various collections such as *Far Side* and *Calvin and Hobbes*
- The *Alex Rider* series and the *Among the Hidden* series
- Gordon Korman materials
- Big books from the David Booth collections
For professional development:
- *Me Read? No Way!* — Ontario Ministry of Education
- *When Kids Can’t Read: What Teachers Can Do* by Kylene Beers

Team Member Quote:

Administrator Quote:

“As I have had experience working as the Student Success leader for the Northeastern Catholic DSB, this project is very much in line with many of the initiatives I worked on for grades 7-12. Many of the resources we currently have our familiar to me as I was able to become familiar with them while a Student Success leader. Our boys need engaging materials and I believe this project is important and worth continuing and expanding.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
- read alouds
- picture books
- literature circles
- writing skills
- variety of fiction and non-fiction works
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Northeastern Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
St. Paul School - Grades 4 to 6

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
John D’Alessandri – Principal
Tom Hudon - Grade 6 teacher
Valerie Koroschetz - Grade 6 teacher
**Essential Question:** Will improved access to engaging and relevant reading materials impact on junior division boys' attitudes towards and motivation to read, and ultimately improve their achievement in reading?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

As a result of new staff members in many of the featured grades, it was difficult to implement the project as extensively as we had originally intended. The two Grade 6 teachers were new to the school and began in late October.

The most apparent finding from the study was that books that featured topics that were interesting to boys increased their willingness to read and share their thoughts about their reading. We have been diligent over the last three years including this year about stocking our library and in-class libraries with books that boys would find engaging and relevant to their lives.

It is obvious from observations made on a daily basis that our boys have found the books that we have specifically targeted for them and provided to them are being used and enjoyed in the classroom setting.

Teachers are also trying to incorporate read-alouds and other texts that are of greater interest to our male readers. (For example, Among the Hidden, and picture books that have social justice themes such as The Harmonica). This initiative enabled the school to provide better selections to teachers for use in their classrooms.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

We implemented the Teacher Learning Critical Pathways strategy this year. This exciting strategy has provided us with valuable insights into the needs of our learners and the ways in which teachers can address those specific needs. We initially used Lily and the Paper Man to create our culminating activity. After careful reflection, we realized that our boys may be better suited to a different type of book and we created our next path around The Harmonica.

One teacher worked on literature circles and we used the abridged version of Treasure Island to help two male readers access the text that they would not otherwise have been able to access. Teachers are increasingly cognizant of providing relevant material to our students in order to increase engagement in the classroom through the use of differentiated instruction strategies. This will continue to be an area of focus, as we recognize that more appropriate reading materials and questions that boys are comfortable answering will lead to an increase in student achievement in the classroom for all students.

**Student Quote:**
“I enjoy reading adventure books and non-fiction history books. I would like to see even more history books in our collections.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

We are in the final year of a three year project. We have experienced considerable change as a new principal and two new Grade 6 teachers who both began in late October, entered the project. We are a Turn Around school and therefore release time for PLC’s is available for all teachers.

From previous reports and observations, it is apparent that a focus was in place to increase the number of available books and resources for our male readers. We are a school with a significant special education population as well as a high number of aboriginal students. Over ½ of the staff is in their first 4 years, while the remainder of the staff ranges from 5 years to 30 years of experience.

We have focused on our students’ writing this year through focused professional development and enhanced opportunities for writing. We have also conducted a book study around Better Answers by Ardith Davis Cole which resulted in a school wide focus on the strategies contained in Better Answers.

As well, we have used the project and our Turn Around experience to improve and enhance our instructional practices for all students. We have tried to bring in resources to engage our male readers at all levels from JK to Grade 6. We intend to continue to improve upon this area and expand our use of the resources we have while being on the look out for new resources that can help us in our quest to improve.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

Our next steps will be to continue to look for resources and strategies that will enhance the literacy lives of our male students, while not ignoring the particular needs of our female students.

We will continue to work on Critical Pathways, always with an eye to incorporating questions and texts that our male readers will find interesting.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“I have noticed that my son has read a vast number of adventure books including the entire Alex Rider collection. He also enjoys non-fiction works, such as hockey biographies and others.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Our Term 1 CASI data highlighted student responses in Questions 1 to 8 using the following criteria.

- **Green**: Level 3 and 4
- **Yellow**: Level 2
- **Orange**: Level 1

This Chart is from Grade 6, Term 1

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<th>Fiction / Non-Fic.</th>
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This Chart shows the same Grade 6 class in Term 2 after the classroom use of teacher and self-selected text and enhanced learning using **Best Practice** strategies and the Critical Pathway strategy.

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FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Our data shows that text selection does play a role in the success of boys in the junior division. When boys are engaged in the text they demonstrate a more competent level of understanding. This then results in increased enthusiasm for reading and a general improvement in attitudes towards school.

More work is needed in order to improve reading levels of boys in Grades 4 through 6. This will be accomplished in a variety of ways. The best way to get students to become better readers is by making them read more often. This particular initiative allowed the school to purchase texts that boys find engaging and easy to read.

It is anticipated that strategies that are implemented at the school and classroom level will continue to impact learning outcomes not only for our male learners but for everyone.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

The study enabled us to reflect on the types of materials currently in use in the classroom. Boys can be reached with a variety of fiction and non-fiction works and it is crucial that we have as many different resources as possible to create a learning environment that is conducive to success.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
We felt that boys were much more inclined to choose texts that were non-fiction. They like any high interest, low vocabulary text that focuses on sports, weather disasters, history, transportation and the Ripley’s Believe it or Not series. Also of interest to boys was the Bones series, The Alex Rider series, The Among the Hidden series, Gordon Korman materials, Big Books from the David Booth collections, the Bold Print Series, and non-fiction mysteries or phenomenons.

For professional development:
Me Read No Way, Ontario Ministry of Education
When Kids Can’t Read, What Teachers Can Do by Kylene Beers.
The Reading Zone by Nancie Atwell
The Continuum of Literacy Learning by Fountas & Pinnell

Team Member Quote:

Administrator Quote:
As I have had experience working as the Student Success Leader for the Board, this project is very much in line with many of the initiatives I worked on in Grades 7-12. Many of the resources we currently have are familiar to me as I was able to become familiar with them while in Student Success. Our boys need engaging materials and I believe that this project is important and worth continuing and expanding.

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
engagement, high-interest, CASI results, aboriginal, low socio-economic
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Sudbury Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
St. Paul the Apostle Catholic School
Grade 5 – 2005-06
Grade 6 – 2006-07
Grade 7– 2007-08

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Lianne Perreault-Raymond
Marlene Lee
Sharon Oliver
Ed Burla
Essential Question: Will a change in teaching strategies for boys affect attitudes towards reading and will there be a corresponding change in achievement?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

• The use of high-interest materials that engage boys can make a significant difference in their attitudes towards learning.

• Read alouds are very much enjoyed and their shortness contributes to higher-order answers when discussing the books.

• Differentiated instruction is needed when working with boys.

• Professionals who are aware of boys' literacy issues can be a major difference.

• Writing is viewed positively in the primary grades.

• Attitudes toward reading are already firmly set in the primary grades.

• More non-fiction materials should be used in reading intervention programs.

• Short pieces such as newspaper articles and historical pieces appeal to boys.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

• We frequently used short stories for read alouds.

• We found that newspaper articles and Skyrider materials were successful for shared reading.

• We found that boys struggle to stay focussed during independent reading.

• We developed units stressing non-fiction topics and materials.

• We found that it is important to bear in mind the length of the reading assignment.

Student Quote:
“I think this program will help other kids because I hated reading in the beginning, but now I don’t have a problem with it. It was a good experience for the boys in the program.”

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This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

The class we chose for this project was one that was predominately boys. They were a kinesthetic group who did not like to read and vocalized their dislike of school regularly. Academically, they were not a strong class.

Our team sat together to determine what materials we needed for the classroom and, with some input from the boys themselves, we made the purchases. We physically re-arranged the classroom and created a boys’ “dungeon”. This was not only a curriculum tie-in, but became a “boys only” reading area.

There was an immediate positive effect on the boys. Books were continually in their desks and they could not wait for the opportunity to visit “the dungeon”. Their developing confidence in reading was further enhanced with visits to the grade 1 class to read to the students.

Based on another suggestion in Me Read? No, Way!, we did research on local history. This history was taken by the boys, developed into a play, and performed by the class at the local Historica Fair. The following year, when the boys were in grade 6, we purchased more materials. We planned a special unit on the Titanic to stimulate interest in non-fiction. The students produced many literacy projects as part of the unit. They researched a real person from the Titanic guest list and role played at a final dinner on the ship. The students watched A Night to Remember, the original film made to commemorate the event. Students compared and contrasted the real events to what was depicted in the film and to other Hollywood creations.

Grade 6 was an EQAO year. It was a disappointment. With all the positive comments we had received from the boys in the previous two years and with all the enthusiasm we had seen in various literacy activities, the results of the EQAO attitude surveys still indicated that they did not like to read.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

• Attitude surveys show that boys are already reluctant readers by the time they finish grade 3. We will inform teachers and parents of the pivotal roles that they have in forming these attitudes.

• We will educate our boys that reading is not solely about books provided by the school, but encompasses a whole gamut of materials.

• We will endeavour to ensure that “boy friendly” reading materials are available for all classrooms. We will focus on the primary grades this year and interview the students to determine what they like to read.

• Our intermediate boys will be part of a Teacher Leadership Initiative Project offered by the Ministry.

• Will visual literacy improve reading, writing, and higher-order thinking skills? Will using cameras on a
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?
DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Since our essential question involved the effects of attitudes upon achievement, both qualitative and quantitative data was important to our inquiry.

We had a wealth of quantitative data available – DRA, CASI, mid-term assessments, and EQAO results. In the end, we decided to use only report marks for the three-year period of the project. A chart showing all DRA, CASI, mid-term assessments, EQAO results, and report card marks was very difficult to read. Too much data can be confusing and makes it difficult to see trends. The report card marks was a constant throughout the three years. Although the scorer (the teacher) may have changed, the result (the mark) is a constant because it shows a student’s overall achievement through a period of time.

The one problem that did occur with the report cards was the movement of the students from the junior to the intermediate grades. What had been letter marks for two years became percentage grades.

Throughout the program, we conducted several surveys and interviews. In the end, we chose to limit the qualitative data to the EQAO attitude surveys.

Surveys given during and after boys’ literacy activities were generally positive; which was not a surprise. However, we felt that comparing attitudes when the boys had finished grade 3 with attitudes when they had finished grade 6 would be more valid than comparing attitudes through school surveys given prior to an activity (grade 5), during, and after an activity (grades 5, 6, and 7).
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Considering the report card marks for the boys shown in the chart below, there are some interesting observations. There was little positive improvement in writing and reading for the 2005-06 school year – the project did not get into full swing until that school year was half over.

It was in the 2006-07 school year that marks gradually improved, when the resources were available at the beginning of the year, and when the grade 6 teacher (like the grade 5 teacher) was using these resources to meet the learning needs and styles of the boys. It was the combination of resources, instructional strategies, and assessments that resulted in an overall improvement in most boys’ reading marks from first through third term.

Naysayers could say that the change was the result of marking conservatively in term one and then gradually increasing marks throughout the rest of the year. To dispel this, one has only to look at the female marks to see that the majority of female marks stayed the same throughout the year. The boys’ writing marks show a similar improvement. Here too, the majority of boys improved throughout the year with no boy regressing.

There was a positive change in achievement in reading and writing. Was there a similar change in attitude?

Individual surveys conducted during or after major literacy initiatives show a positive approval for the initiatives. Sadly, this positive finding did not show up in the EQAO attitude surveys and there was a decline in percentages of students who believed themselves to be good readers and liked to read. This result has led us to believe that a negative attitude to reading is so ingrained in our students by negative early learning experiences that we must concentrate efforts to improve attitudes in the early years.

We also believe that there must be explicit instruction about the many facets of reading. Reading is not just

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Girls  | Boys

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teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca  
This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
### EQAO ATTitudinal Surveys

#### Grade 3

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#### Grade 6

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**GR:** I am a good Reader  
**LR:** I like to read  
**M:** Percentage on EQAO testing level 3 or better  
**GW:** I am a good writer  
**LW:** I like to write

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### EQAO Attitudinal Survey: School, Board, Province

#### Grade 3

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teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca  
This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

Choosing a grade 5 class and following that class through three years has resulted in a closer co-operative effort among our teachers.

First, the materials we purchased for these boys were divided in the book room to be shared.

When the boys moved to grade 6, the new teacher needed to be introduced to the study and get an understanding of the available resources. She enthusiastically "bought in" and requested the purchase of supplies she could use. Other teachers in the junior division became more aware of the materials available in the book room and also started incorporating them into their instruction.

As the boys moved into grade 7, it was necessary to make the linkage between the junior and intermediate divisions. This move was almost seamless since the grade 6 teacher “moved up” with the boys into grade 7. She requested and purchased additional resources and these were shared with the other teachers in the intermediate division.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Power Magazines: Gagelearning
The Team Warp Trio: Puffin

For professional development:

Team Member Quote:
“I loved seeing my boys wanting to read, hiding books in their desks, and discussing together what they were reading. They were engaged and excited about reading – which was the goal I had set for them and the project.

Administrator Quote:
“The Boys’ Literacy Project has been an exciting and beneficial undertaking here at St. Paul the Apostle Catholic School. It has been gratifying to observe boys engaging in reading for pleasure and a delight to see them developing an interest in a varied assortment of reading materials. Their desire to read and their fondness for reading are both directly attributable to this project.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
dungeon; tribes; Titanic; local history; read alouds
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
St. Peter Catholic School — Grades 4-8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Melissa Markotic – Grade 7/8 teacher
Sean Griffin – Grade 6/7 teacher
Amanda Graham – Grade 4/5 teacher
Charis Taylor – Special Education Resource teacher
Lisa McDonald – Special Assignment teacher
Karen Leavitt – Vice-Principal
Karen Moran – Principal

teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca  This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
**Essential Question:** Will student-select resources and boys' participation in literature circles in grades 4 to 8 have a positive impact on boys' attitudes and skills in reading and writing for meaning?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Determine the interests of boys through Interest Inventories, conferences, and interviews so that proper resources are available for self-selection.
- Create a “Book Nook” with these resources.
- Order many resources as recommended in *Me Read? No Way!*
- Have Professional Learning Community (PLC) sessions for teachers of boys to collaboratively plan literature circles using the backward design model.
- Engage in Teacher Moderation when assessing student work.
- Teach specific skills explicitly and consistently to improve student performance over time.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

- Collaborative planning was essential!
- It was extremely important to use literature circles across divisions to link reading and writing.
- It was absolutely necessary to link reading to relevant and authentic issues.
- It was important to use instructional and evaluation rubrics consistently.
- It was important to include “accountable talk” in lessons.
- Regular practice leads to enhanced achievement of skills.

**Student Quote:**

“Boys’ literacy has helped me a great deal in reading. When I’m in boys’ literature circles, I feel I can talk openly about what I’ve learned from the book and read passages to others so maybe they have the same interest I do. The boys’ Book Nook has influenced me a great deal in reading because I have people to talk to about the books. I find more interesting books and stories I want to read. I also love being able to choose from many categories of novels: Adventure, Science, History, or maybe Mystery, depending on what I want to read. The Book Nook also gives me a quiet environment to read because if I don’t have quiet I’m not as eager to read. Sometimes it does get a little noisy in the classroom. All together the boys reading program has helped a great deal. I hope they have it next year.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Our story was a journey to determine how the instructional use of literature circles could impact boys’ attitudes and preferences towards reading. It began with the establishment of a school inquiry team consisting of junior and intermediate teachers and administrative support. During Professional Learning Community sessions, we collaboratively determined how to collect data, analyze data, and implement effective literature circles. Together our team also reviewed recommended resources and purchased appropriate materials in order to establish a Boys’ Book Nook.

There were many highlights and insights on our journey. As the project progressed, we noticed that student participation and social book talk developed. Students enjoyed attending the Boys’ Book Nook regularly. They were more engaged in discussions during these visits, recommending texts to peers and teachers. Many boys preferred to sign out magazines, newspapers, and other non-fiction reading materials. During our literacy block, boys developed debating skills about authentic and relevant issues. They were able to transfer this learning to non-fiction persuasive writing.

In addition to observing the growth of our students, we enjoyed the opportunities to meet as a professional learning team. We valued participating in the moderated marking process, despite the extra amount of time required to plan for absence from our classrooms. Our team recognized that the students often found it challenging to meet our high expectations consistently. Together, we met this challenge by establishing anchor charts, rubrics, and providing regular explicit feedback to support student improvement.

Our parent community responded positively to our literacy project. In order to keep parents informed of student progress, work was sent home on a regular basis. Some of our parents have told us that their children are reading more, and are more selective of what they read and who the author is. We also provided regular updates at our monthly School Council Meetings. Parents were interested in the development of the project, particularly in the purchase of resources and the use of the Boys’ Book Nook. In addition, each monthly school newsletter highlighted elements of literacy that included strategies and tips for parents.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

New Questions
• What software supports boys’ literacy?
• How do we make this a school-wide focus?
• How can we network with other schools involved in boys’ literacy projects?

Areas of Continued Focus
• Reading and writing link (School Improvement Plan)
• At board level, Student Success Literacy Cross Panel Committee
• At board level, through data collection and analysis, attempt to close the gap between boys’ and girls’ performance on EQAO and OSSLT assessments.

Parent/Guardian Quote: “This program seeks to engage elementary aged boys in reading literature. I see two major, positive benefits in this program: fostering enjoyment in reading for its own sake, and fostering the skills associated with becoming a good reader. Thus far, in my view, the program seems to be meeting its objectives. Through literature circles, a central feature of the program, boys read selected novels and discuss what they have read in groups. Written assignments allow students to: 1) analyze what they have read; 2) make intra-text connections, connections to their own lives, and to the “real” world, and 3) organize their ideas about the subject matter.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Our Essential Question focused on two issues:
1) improving boys’ attitudes in reading and writing; and
2) improving boys’ skills in reading and writing for meaning.

We used different data sources to examine the impact of literature circles for boys in grades 4 to 8.

Summary of Objectives and Data Sources Used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improving boys’ attitudes in reading and writing</th>
<th>CASI Reading Attitude Survey</th>
<th>Used for grades 4 – 8 boys in the fall and spring of 2006/07 and 2007/08 school years.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improving boys’ skills in reading and writing</td>
<td>EQAO Questionnaire</td>
<td>Used to examine the change in attitudes towards reading demonstrated in grade 6. Questionnaires were examined for four years of data (2003/04 to 2006/07). Questions examined were, “I am a good reader/writer”, “I like to read/write”, and, “I read/write by myself at home”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EQAO assessments of reading and writing</td>
<td>Used to examine overall school and gender performance on EQAO assessments of reading and writing (2002/03 to 2006/07). Used to examine the overall change in reading and writing scores for two cohorts: 2002/03-2005/06 2003/04-2006/07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Report Card</td>
<td>Percentages of girls and boys at L3 and L4 on reading and writing strands were examined for two school years: 2006/07 (Terms 1, 2, 3) 2007/08 (Terms 1, 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moderated Marking</td>
<td>Used to examine boys’ performances in the fall and spring of the 2007/08 school year.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The CASI Reading Attitude Survey was used to decipher the changes in boys’ attitudes toward reading.

EQAO data was examined to reflect on overall changes in achievement by gender in our school. We examined our own student progress in light of the “bigger picture” of how boys were doing.

Report card data enabled us to follow the progress of individual students for reading and writing over time, as well as aggregate the data to get a sense of achievement by gender in the class and school.

Moderated marking allowed us, as a team, to consistently apply a single rubric to three class sets of written responses in order to level student work five times over a two year period. The results of the moderated marking enabled us to see the areas of instruction for which we needed to be more explicit. For example, we had to explicitly teach how to go back to the text and cite supporting evidence, and how reading the text promotes a deeper understanding of a social issue.
**FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?**

Our results are mixed. We have some evidence to show that self-selected reading and literature circles helped to improve boy’s attitudes and skills. However, we need to be cautious in drawing conclusions from our data because:

1) St. Peter is a small school, often with classes of fewer than 13 boys. Not only do privacy issues need to be considered when presenting the data, but it is also difficult to analyze trends (as small numbers affect both the reliability and validity of the data).

2) ALCDSB did not move to system wide electronic collection and storage of data until 2006/07. This made it challenging to obtain some historical data.

Below we have provided a summary of Key Findings related to our two objectives.

**Objective 1: Improving Boy’s Attitudes in Reading and Writing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Key Findings and Reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CASI Reading Attitude Survey</td>
<td>Two years of data are demonstrated in Tables 1 and 2 below. More boys were answering that they “agree” or “strongly agree” with the questions on the survey in spring terms than in fall terms of the school year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6 EQAO Student Questionnaire</td>
<td>Small numbers of students affected the reliability of findings. However, when viewing the data over four years, overwhelmingly, a lower percentage of boys than girls answered “yes” to the questions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- I am a good reader/writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- I like to read/write</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- I read/write by myself at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This trend was beginning to change in the 2006/07 school year, when 83% of boys answered “yes” to, “I like to read”, and more boys than girls answered “yes” to, “I like to write” and “I write by myself at home”. We will need to continue to monitor boys’ answers to the EQAO questionnaires to understand if the change is a trend, or a one time event.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CASI Reading Attitude Survey: Percentage of Males at Level 3 (Agree) and Level 4 (Strongly Agree)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Table 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1 - I read for enjoyment.</td>
<td>Q1 - I read for enjoyment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2 - I like to talk about ideas and information after I have read something.</td>
<td>Q2 - I like to talk about ideas and information after I have read something.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3 - I think non-fiction is easier to read than fiction.</td>
<td>Q3 - I think non-fiction is easier to read than fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4 - I read to learn about things that interest me.</td>
<td>Q4 - I read to learn about things that interest me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5 - I choose books to read that other people have recommended.</td>
<td>Q5 - I choose books to read that other people have recommended.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

**Objective 2: Improving Boys’ Skills in Reading and Writing for Meaning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Key Findings and Reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6 EQAO Reading and Writing Assessments</td>
<td>Grade 6 EQAO scores overall for the past 5 years for both reading and writing fluctuate. Reading scores are higher for the past two years (2005/06 and 2006/07), while writing scores continue to be below 55% of students at L3 and L4 (except for 2005/06 when 67% were at L3 and L4).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender differences in reading and writing for two cohorts are shown in Table 3 and 4 below. Reading results indicate that both cohorts improved dramatically from grade 3 (when no students achieved at or above the provincial standard) to grade 6 (when 100% of girls and 57% of boys achieved at or above the provincial standard). Results were similar for girls and boys in Cohort 2 in grades 3 and 6.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing results for Cohort 1 indicate a significant gain in percentage of girls at or above the provincial standard and a smaller gain for boys. For Cohort 2, the percentage of girls at or above the provincial standard decreased by 22%, and remained the same for boys at 50%. Sample sizes affect the reliability of results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report Card Data (Reading and Writing Strands)</td>
<td>Reading and writing report card marks for two years indicate that there are higher percentages of girls at L3 and L4 than boys in all grades. It appears that girls and boys have marks that are more alike in Term 1 and Term 2. Reading and writing report card marks in 2006/07 for Term 3 indicate that many more girls achieved at L3 and L4 than did boys. It will be important to examine 2007/08 Term 3 report card marks when they become available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderated Marking</td>
<td>Boys’ results were examined in the spring and fall for two classes. Table 5 on the next page shows the percentages of boys achieving at L3 and Level 4 in the spring and fall (after being involved in literature circles). The percentages of boys achieving L3 and L4 increased in all three classes from the fall to the spring. Once again, small class sizes affect the reliability of our data. It will be important to continue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers provided input on potential reasons for the increase in scores. Feedback included:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Explicit teaching based on first results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interest in topic used to persuade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Specific narrowed focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Plenty of writing/reading practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Opportunity to evaluate reading samples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EQAO Table 3</td>
<td>Boys were questioned and were very pleased with their reading results.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Table 3](image1.png)  
![Table 4](image2.png)
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

Objective 2: Improving Boys’ Skills in Reading and Writing for Meaning (cont.)

Table 5:

Moderated Marking of Literature Circles
% of Boys at L3 and L4

![Bar chart showing percentages of boys at L3 and L4 in fall and spring.]

Summary

Our inquiry project results are mixed with respect to both boys' attitudes and skills in reading and writing.

The most promising data is related to the CASI Reading Attitude Survey, which indicates an increase in the percentages of boys answering “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to questions related to reading attitudes. The EQAO test results are also encouraging and show that the percentages of boys performing at or above the provincial standard increased from grade 3 to grade 6. Also, the moderated marking data indicates that more boys were achieving L3 and L4 in the spring than in the fall, following literature circles.

Results for all data sets are affected by small sample sizes, and the lack of historical data (for more than one or two years).
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

We have developed a deeper understanding of boys’ interests in literacy and their learning styles. As a result, we have adjusted our professional practices to meet our boys’ needs. Through working together as a Professional Learning Team, we have moved much closer to a consistent approach to leveling student work and understanding what Level 3 and Level 4 work looks like. We are now sharing lessons, student work, and working collaboratively to meet student needs. We know that boys are interested in and respond to social issues through non-fiction literature. The data we collected during moderated marking informed our next instructional steps (e.g., citing supporting details from the text and persuasive writing). Student achievement for culminating activities in literature circles, as well as cross-curricular literature skills, improved.

Some of our challenges are:

- no full time library resource personnel;
- no space to display books by author or topics (limited shelving space);
- limited knowledge and availability of computer software for boys; and
- staffing for the Book Nook.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- Magazines
- Graphic novels
- Non-fiction texts
- Newspapers
- Author collections

For professional development:
- Me Read? No Way! — Ontario Ministry of Education
- Mini-lessons for Literature Circles by Harvey Daniels
- Boys’ Writers – Reclaiming Their Voices by Ralph Fletcher

Team Member Quote:
“The Boys’ Literacy Project recognizes boys’ interests, learning styles, and needs. It has been instrumental in connecting boys with books and has turned sometimes reluctant participants into readers!”

Administrator Quote:
“Over the past two years that I have been involved in this project, we have worked as a team during Professional Learning Community meetings to build consistent teacher practices in the instructional use of literature circles, use of accountable talk, posing higher-order thinking questions, and using instructional rubrics with students to help them achieve Level 3 or 4 on culminating tasks. The PLC format allowed us to discuss and purchase resources suited to boys’ interests. PLC’s also allowed us to clarify our understanding of higher-order thinking questions and our consistent application of a rubric to evaluate student work. The PLC meetings opened the door to consistent expectations among three junior-intermediate classrooms. Our team worked very hard to reach out to the specific needs of boys and their connections to literacy. It was a great experience.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
consistency of teacher practice; moderated marking; literature circles; Professional Learning Communities; Boys’ Book Nook
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Toronto District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Tom Longboat Junior Public School

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Joan Bayley
Tara Stephen
Juliet Riding

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
**Essential Question:** Does the literacy level of boys improve when they are given a specific purpose for and instructional support for their independent reading; that is, greater access to age and gender appropriate books in the classroom, use of oral and written reading responses, and daily opportunities for oral sharing and demonstration of comprehension?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Boys prefer reading fiction to non-fiction when it is action packed, exciting, and has interesting male characters. They choose non-fiction because it is real and specific and they can learn something about the world.

- Boys are motivated by competition such as trivia contests in the weekly club meetings and getting enough signatures on the Silver Birch passports to be able to vote and be invited to the author celebration.

- Boys need time to talk about what they have read.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

This project has supported other literacy initiatives in our school. We were already maintaining a data wall to track DRA and CASI scores twice a year. We have a Reach Out and Read Day where community volunteers come to read to the students. We have moved towards an emphasis on non-fiction writing:

- K-3 procedural writing, and grades 4-6 persuasive writing. We have used some common planning time, provided through supply coverage, to develop rubrics and moderate marking for each grade. Many staff attended workshops on high-yield strategies that emphasized using non-fiction. Staff have been supportive in reading aloud some of the Silver Birch books to their students. Two teachers made the Silver Birch books such an integral part of their language programs that the entire class qualified to vote (i.e., each student had read and shown adequate comprehension of at least five Silver Birch books). Other teachers used the Reading Response forms as part of their assessments of students’ independent reading levels.

**Student Quote:**

- “I prefer non-fiction because it’s real. I prefer specific things.”
- “I prefer non-fiction because you can learn stuff from it and it sometimes helps you with a project.”
- “I prefer fiction because fiction has a lot of excitement and adventure. I enjoyed Pigboy, Baboon, and The Secret of Grimm Hill.”
- “I like guessing how the problem is solved.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

We have used the Silver Birch Reading Program in our school for many years as an extra-curricular club for students in grades 4 to 6. When we started this project, we purchased the Silver Birch books for each grade 4 to 6 classroom, with the goal of providing greater access to the books, and thereby increasing the number of students participating in the reading program.

In the second year of the project, we expanded to include grade 3 and had the grades 3 and 4 students reading from a separate list called Silver Birch Express. These books were more appropriate for this age because of the easier reading level and the inclusion of some advanced picture books. We invited the grades 5 and 6 students to join the Silver Birch Club as an extra-curricular activity. The cost of putting a complete set of the Silver Birch books in each grade 5 and grade 6 classroom was too prohibitive.

In the third year, we invited all students in grades 3 to 6 to participate in reading Silver Birch Express (a list of 10 books, fiction and non-fiction, for grades 3 and 4) and Silver Birch (one list of 10 fiction books and a second list of 10 non-fiction books for grades 5 and 6). We purchased more copies of each book and housed them in the library to provide equal access to all students. A Silver Birch Reading Club, involving interested students from grades 5 and 6 met once a week at lunch. During the reading club, students wrote trivia questions about the books they read and formed groups for the weekly trivia contest. Prizes were awarded for the winning group. After reading each book, students completed a Reading Response form, which required that they rate the book in various categories and write what the book made them think about (i.e., text to text, text to self, and text to world). For each book read, students also received a passport signed by the teacher who had read that book, thus giving them a specific purpose to talk about what they read. In April, all students who had five signatures on their passport could vote for their favorite book. The voting process was similar to the provincial voting process, with ballot boxes and returning officers. To celebrate their reading, all those who qualified to vote were invited to a celebration to hear a Silver Birch author. The students said it was a great party, since it ended with cake and drinks. The celebration was a huge motivator for students to read. Two teachers had their entire class voting. Classroom teachers in grades 3 to 6 collected the Reading Response forms from their students and read aloud some of the books. Teachers used the Reading Response forms as one way to assess students' independent reading levels.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

We will:
- continue with the two reading programs, Silver Birch Express and Silver Birch, with enough books for all students in grades 3 to 6 to be involved;
- continue with author visits because hearing from an author encourages students to read more; for example, grade 6 students picked up copies of Vicki Garnt's other available books after meeting her;
- continue with Reach Out and Read Day with male readers from the community;
- encourage teachers to read aloud non-fiction;
- encourage teachers to update their classroom collections and highlight adventure, action packed fiction, and current non-fiction;
- continue with the Silver Birch passports, which is a strong motivator for boys; and
- collaborate with classroom teachers to encourage links between reading assessments and Silver Birch activities (e.g., book talks (oral and written) and reading responses involving inferencing and making connections).

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“It was very good for the kids, encouraging them to read the books. They were excited about reading the books. It was good that they were questioned about the books and they had to answer. They were competing against other kids for how many books they could read.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

These marks are for a select group of 20 girls and 20 boys who were in grade 4 in 2005-06 and tracked over three years:

Report Card Marks: Reading

Grade 4, 2005-06, Term 2: A = 0% boys, 0% girls
B = 33% boys, 35% girls
C = 58% boys, 60% girls
D = 8% boys, 5% girls

Grade 5, 2006-07, Term 2: A = 25% boys, 15% girls
B = 16% boys, 45% girls
C = 58% boys, 40% girls
D = 0% boys, 0% girls

Grade 6, 2007-08, Term 2: A = 8% boys, 5% girls
B = 16% boys, 50% girls
C = 33% boys, 40% girls
D = 42% boys, 5% girls

The percentage of boys receiving A in reading decreased from 25% to 8% from last year to this year. However, compared with grade 4, 8% more boys received A this year. The percentage of boys receiving B was 16% for both grade 5 and grade 6. In grade 4, 66% of boys received C or D compared with 75% in grade 6, an increase of 9%.

CASI Marks

Grade 4, 2005-06, Term 1: Level 4 = 0% boys, 0% girls
Level 3 = 0% boys, 16% girls
Level 2 = 36% boys, 33% girls
Level 1 = 64% boys, 50% girls

Grade 5, 2006-07, Term 3: Level 4 = 0% boys, 0% girls
Level 3 = 8% boys, 40% girls
Level 2 = 50% boys, 60% girls
Level 1 = 42% boys, 6% girls

Grade 6, 2007-08, Term 2: Level 4 = 0% boys, 0% girls
Level 3 = 27% boys, 33% girls
Level 2 = 54% boys, 44% girls
Level 1 = 18% boys, 22% girls

From grade 4 to grade 6, the percentage of boys receiving Level 3 increased from 0% to 8% to 27%. Girls receiving Level 3 changed from 16% to 40% to 33%. The percentage of boys receiving Level 2 increased from 36% to 50% to 54%. The percentage of girls receiving Level 2 changed from 33% to 60% to 44%. The percentage of boys receiving Level 1 decreased from 64% to 42% to 18% and the percentage of girls receiving Level 1 changed from 50% to 6% to 22%.

(Continued on next page.)
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?
DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Reading Survey: Reading Preference for Grade 6 Students
Non-fiction: boys 35%, girls 41%
Fiction: boys 65%, girls 58%

Reading Survey: Reading Well
Compared with fall of 2007, more boys perceived themselves as “reading well often” — 39% to 43% — and fewer said they “read well sometimes” — 56% to 52%. The percentage of girls who said they read well increased from 52% to 54% and the percentage who said they “read well sometimes” increased from 44% to 46%.

Library Book Borrowing Statistics
In grade 4, boys checked out 5.75 books per month from the school library. Now, in grade 6, boys check out 3.0 books per month compared with grade 6 girls who check out 6.33 books per month.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Report Card Reading Marks and CASI Marks
There are fewer boys receiving A or B on their report cards for reading and more boys receiving C or D. So reading marks have declined for the selected group of boys from grades 4 to 6. Girls’ reading marks also dropped over the three years from 85% receiving A or B in grade 4 to 55% receiving A or B in grade 6. The percentage of girls receiving A or B decreased by 30%, whereas the percentage of boys receiving A or B decreased by only 9%.

The report card data is disappointing as it indicates an overall decline in the boys’ achievement in reading over the past three years. Our concern is not so much the percentage of boys receiving an A or B as the fairly static results. Rather, we are concerned with the fact that in grades 5 and 6, well over 50% of the boys received a C or D (Levels 1 or 2).

The CASI marks show a steady improvement for boys over the three years. The percentages of boys receiving Levels 3 or 4 in grade 4 was 0%, in grade 5 - 8%, and in grade 6 - 27%. The percentages of boys receiving C or D (Levels 1 or 2) decreased from 100% in grade 4 to 92% in grade 5 to 72% in grade 6. Girls also showed some improvement. The percentages of girls receiving Levels 3 or 4 in grade 4 was 16%, in grade 5 - 40%, and in grade 6 - 33%. The percentages of girls receiving C or D (Levels 1 or 2) decreased from 88% in grade 4 to 66% in grades 5 and 6. While there has been some improvement in CASI marks for boys, well over 50% of boys still received a C or D (Levels 1 or 2).

The obvious question to ask is Why? Why is such a large number of boys not meeting the provincial standard in reading? These are large questions and cannot be answered within the confines of this report. However, we can ask the following question: How can the Silver Birch program be used to improve achievement in reading for our boys?

We feel that if we create a more defined and planned link between the Silver Birch program and the classroom so that reading assessments are linked to activities carried out in the program, we can determine the extent to which the program affects students’ success in reading. Possible linkages could include reading responses to Silver Birch texts that encourage students to make inferences and book talks that incorporate oral and written modes of presentation. Once this determination is made, we can make decisions that we hope will impact reading scores.

Reading Survey
The Reading Survey indicates that 95% of the boys and 100% of the girls continue to say they read well, either often, or sometimes. By reading well, boys say they are able to predict what will happen next, pronounce difficult words, understand what the author is trying to say, imagine what will happen next, and reread to deepen their understanding. This indicates a positive attitude towards reading. Students were given “support for their reading” when the teacher read aloud to them, making the reading more pleasurable, deepening the meaning, and helping them make connections.

In addition, 65% of the boys preferred fiction and 35% preferred non-fiction. For the girls, 58% preferred fiction and 42% preferred non-fiction. So non-fiction was more popular with the girls than the boys. These results were surprising because we believed that boys in general preferred non-fiction. However, they preferred fiction that had boys as the main characters and a story line that had a lot of adventure, excitement, and action. They also liked guessing how the problem would be solved. Those who preferred non-fiction said they liked reading about what is real and specific. The selection of fiction books on this year’s Silver Birch list made all the difference to the boys because many books used males as the main characters and the plots were action packed and exciting.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

- We need to make sure we give boys many opportunities to talk about the books they are reading.
- Have the right mixture of fiction and non-fiction available for boys. The fiction should be action packed, exciting, adventurous, and use males as the main characters. The non-fiction should be full of real life pictures with captions and headings and other eye-catching text features.
- Boys are reading less and borrowing fewer books from the library as they get older (i.e., five books per month down to three books per month in grade 6).
- Boys are motivated by competition such as answering trivia questions about the books, getting their Silver Birch passports signed at least five times, completing the Reading Response forms as part of their reading assessment, and striving for the reward of the author visit with a food celebration.
- We need to continue to move away from whole class novel studies and give boys more individual choice in what they read; for example, by making better use of literature circles.
- We need to continue to model reading non-fiction to validate this genre and encourage real-life talk about the books. Boys, in particular, enjoy the real and specific facts.
- Classroom libraries need to be continuously updated with the same kinds of relevant non-fiction and exciting, adventurous fiction.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- magazines, X Zone, Power Magazine, Silver Birch fiction and non-fiction, newspapers

For professional development:
- Nonfiction Matters by Stephanie Harvey
- Strategies that Work by Stephanie Harvey
- Reading With Meaning by Debbie Miller

Team Member Quote:
- “Tracking students over three years and focusing on boys and literacy was a great learning experience.”
  — Joan Bayley

Administrator Quote:
- “I am very pleased with my teachers, their commitment to this project, and their unwavering effort to improve boys’ literacy skills.” — Joan Willis

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
- non-fiction; competition; adventure; fiction; specific
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Upsala District School Area Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Upsala Public School – JK-Grade 8

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:

Cheryl Lysak — principal, special education teacher, lead member of school achievement planning team, member of school literacy sub-committee

Tricia Hicks – lead junior teacher, teacher of grades 3-5, member of school achievement planning team

Paula Shedden – lead Pathways/Student Success teacher, teacher of grades 6-8, member of school achievement planning team

Shirley Niemi – lead primary teacher, teacher of JK-grade 2, member of school achievement planning team, member of school literacy sub-committee

Melissa Deschenes – parent member of school council, member of school literacy sub-committee

Shannon Riding – parent member of school council, member of school literacy sub-committee
**Essential Question:**
Will junior boys’ involvement with interactive reading materials positively impact engagement in reading and subsequent reading achievement levels?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Ongoing, regular data-based decision-making is vital in order to appropriately respond to ever-changing student needs.
- Cross-grade/cross-division teacher collaboration is key to sustaining progress.
- Student engagement provides the critical foundation for ongoing learning.
- Student engagement can be stimulated in a number of ways by:
  - providing “the right stuff”;
  - putting in place organizational structures that allow student input in purchasing decisions related to “the right stuff”;
  - appealing to preferred learning styles (e.g., providing multiple opportunities for talk, use of self-chosen flexible groupings/peer teaching/sharing opportunities, and hands-on manipulation/interaction/exploration opportunities).

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

- Teachers’ beliefs related to the importance of student talk, student interaction, and the use of fluid self-chosen groupings (within the structure preset by the teacher) were validated, resulting in an overall teacher commitment to the belief that boys can and will make responsible learning choices if effectively engaged in the learning process.
- Teachers now provide an ever-widening array of non-traditional “reading materials” in their classrooms and provide many opportunities to engage boys through the use of interactive materials and strategies.
- Teachers now use oral language strategies (e.g., opportunities for sustained talk, collaborative student interaction, peer sharing, and peer teaching) and are enhancing engagement, understanding, and deeper thinking skills.
- Teachers schedule daily time blocks to ensure students have adequate time and opportunity to explore areas/topics of personal/peer interest and to enjoy, learn, and practice with “the right stuff”.
- Teachers more readily allow students to take control over the direction of their learning.
- Teachers’ assessment practices have become increasingly focused, with attention paid to both quantitative and qualitative data, data disaggregation, and data triangulation.
- Teachers analyze assessment results for the purposes of determining strengths, weaknesses, and next steps.

**Student Quote:**
“What I like about the Interactive Learning Kits is that you can have fun even when you are learning. You can carry them easily. They are addictive. They are colorful and they don’t look boring. I like how you interact with them. I think my favorite kit is the one with the hand because you learn how the hand moves without skin. You can learn about many things in each one. Some of them are challenging, but they are still lots of fun. You can play with a friend and also by yourself. You never get bored.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Staff were concerned that, while grade 3 boys typically exceeded provincial scores in reading, writing, and math, they did not enjoy that same level of success at grade 6. While grade 6 boys continued to excel in math, they performed slightly lower in reading and writing. Our anecdotal evidence indicated that — beginning in the junior division and continuing into the intermediate division — boys’ engagement in reading appeared to decline, as did overall parental involvement. Junior and intermediate boys were described as being “less interested in reading”, “having a difficult time making book-borrowing choices”, and “no longer interested in sharing their reading at home with their families”. These behaviors were in sharp contrast to those exhibited by the same boys while in the primary division, when male students were described as “enthused and reading with parents on a nightly basis”. These changing behaviors were of particular concern to us because of our disproportionate number of male students. (At the time, 86% of SK-Grade 4 students were boys.) We suspected that, with the appropriate approach and “the right stuff”, boys could remain fully engaged in reading throughout their lives.

We designed our inquiry project to build our capacity to provide “the right stuff” so boys’ literacy skills could be improved and sustained over time. The “right stuff” took the form of interactive — and therefore highly engaging — reading kits. Each kit contained a book and related manipulatives intended to assist boys’ interaction with, and ultimate understanding of “text” (e.g., 3D glasses with 3D books, books with overlays, and procedural texts with complementary construction materials such as origami, string games, and models).

Initially, we exposed the students to the kits during structured classroom time along with teacher modeling, and shared learning experiences. This introductory period was followed by structured opportunities, during daily dedicated time periods, for peer/small group practice and play with the kits. In addition, we provided in-service and mentoring for teachers and support staff — as well as parent workshops — all intended to build team understanding of gender-based learning differences and to build capacity to “teach with purpose”, “be in their corner”, “keep it real”, “let them talk”, “drive the point home”, and “make it a habit”. Given this approach, we hypothesized that boys would be more engaged in the reading process, increase their depth of understanding, improve academic achievement, and become lifelong readers.

Over the three years of the project, we tracked reading engagement and achievement data and concluded that junior boys’ reading engagement and subsequent reading achievement could indeed be sustained — even increased — when students are provided with “the right stuff”, dedicated time blocks that honor preferred learning styles, multiple opportunities for leadership and talk, the use of self-chosen flexible/peer teaching/shared opportunities, and hands-on interaction/manipulation/exploration experiences.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

Our data revealed that engagement levels decreased during the summer months when our community’s students have fewer opportunities to access “the right stuff” and fewer opportunities to interact with peers. As a next step, our school literacy team is exploring the possibility of making the school library available to families one day per week during the summer vacation period. We believe that this would help keep students engaged during the summer months and would make “summer setback” less pronounced.

We will continue our “Student Choice Initiative” and allow students direct input in purchasing decisions related to the “right stuff”. As well, we will continue the instructional strategies we adopted during the years of the inquiry project (e.g., opportunities for sustained talk, collaborative student interaction, peer sharing/peer teaching, fluid self-chosen groupings, hands-on manipulation/exploration, use of non-traditional text, and designated time blocks).

Finally, it has been suggested that our inquiry team share project findings and recommendations with teachers from other isolate boards, through an upcoming Northern School Resource Alliance Conference. ‘We look forward to “spreading the word”.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“The Interactive Reading Kits are great! They help the children learn in different ways about so very many different things. They really put the interest back in learning. I love them.”
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Over the course of the project, data collection took a variety of forms – both qualitative and quantitative.

Students completed DRA reading engagement surveys at intervals throughout the project (i.e., each year before, during, and after the use of the interactive reading materials) and the results were particularly revealing. Analysis of survey data allowed team members to clearly see changing levels of engagement, changing levels of interest, and changes in both the amount and types of materials being read (see findings).

We triangulated and validated the student survey data with teacher observational data on all the students (collected via a checklist of consistent look-fors to ensure a common language) and library lending profiles.

Quantitative data in the form of reading scores was also very telling. Boys were assessed, using the DRA, at regular intervals throughout the project (i.e., each year before, during, and after use of the interactive reading materials). These scores allowed us to track not only changing levels of achievement (see findings), but also changes in specific thinking skill areas.

EQAO test results for the boys involved in the project appear to corroborate the DRA findings. The results indicated that the boys were enjoying the same level of success they had when tested in grade 3 (i.e., meeting the provincial standard) and were no longer losing ground over the course of their junior years.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Reading Engagement Scores Over Time

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*Signifies introduction of Interactive Reading Kits into classrooms.*

**Observations**
- Trend toward a post-summer drop in engagement levels.
- Use of “Interactive Reading Kits” appears to have sustained or increased reading engagements levels.

**Next Steps**
- Continue use of interactive reading materials at junior division.
- Pursue possibility of family access to school reading materials over summer months through board’s “Keep Good Schools Open Program” as a means of sustaining reading engagement over the course of the holiday period.
### FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

#### 2006-2008 Junior Division Boys' Year 2 and 3 DRA Data

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**WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?**

Involvement in the project has resulted in an increased focus on the collection of assorted forms of data, disaggregation of that data, and a commitment to thorough analysis in order to determine strengths, weaknesses, and next steps. Cross-grade/cross-division teacher collaboration has become standard practice, with staff committed not only to sustaining the progress of boys, but the progress of any and all at-risk groups or individuals. Perhaps the most important impact has been our realization that, even though we are educators, we do not always know what will best engage students – student input and choice appears to be key in sustaining reading engagement and subsequent reading achievement.

**WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?**

For Boys:
- Interactive reading materials (text with opportunities for hands-on manipulation)
- Games requiring the reading of instructions or cards
- “Student Choice Initiative” (allow students input into library purchasing decisions)

For professional development:
- TIME (funded release for teacher moderation, collaboration, data analysis, determination of next steps)
- PLC opportunities (funded release focusing on needs of targeted groups)
- *Me Read? No Way!* (very practical tips)

**Team Member Quote:**

“Who would have thought that our boys would have liked doing origami…or cat’s cradle (after reading procedural texts with instructions related to both), and that girls would equally enjoy what are often considered to be stereotypical male materials?”

**Administrator Quote:**

“The boys’ literacy inquiry project has been a wonderful professional learning experience for our staff. We have learned so much about preferred materials and preferred strategies that contribute to boys’ success. The project has augmented teaching practice within the school and has helped facilitate data-driven decision-making related, not just to boys, but to all at-risk groups and individuals.”

**List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:**

interactive reading materials; summer setback; reading engagement; student choice; right stuff
Final School Report: 2008
Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
York Region District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
W. J. Watson P.S. — The focus has been on intermediate students, particularly grade 8.

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Jan McDonald – SERT
Jennifer Shepherd – Grade 8
Janet Keilhack – Teacher Librarian
Tammy Green – Grade 6
David Moore – Grade 8
Jean Rudman – Vice-Principal
Essential Question:
How can we use boys’ personal connections to further develop their productive disposition towards reading?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

We found that boys appreciate having a choice. When students pick their own books for literacy circles or other activities, they become more engaged in the assignment. Also, giving them the power to pick books for the library was great because they saw their own choices available to sign out in their own library.

We discovered that boys value the opportunity to engage in oral communication. When they are given a written task, they are more likely to become disengaged.

We introduced various forms of technology (e.g., digital still and video cameras, programs on the Mac laptops such as Comic Life, Garage Band, and Word Power Point) and student interest increased dramatically. The use of technology grabs boys' interest because they use it constantly in their lives. They were quite self-sufficient when problem solving glitches they encountered while using the technology. Being able to solve their own problems and learn how to use the programs made them feel independent and empowered.

We found that it is important to get to know your students and pick topics that interest them when planning units. If they are interested in what they are learning, they are more likely to be engaged in tasks related to that topic.

Finally, we found that the use of incentives encouraged boys to be more active in choosing reading material. We used bookmarks to track what they read and also used the bookmarks in weekly draws for books. We found that the boys were enthusiastic about winning a brand new book and therefore more willing to read.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

Our instructional and assessment practices were impacted because we were more apt to work collaboratively on units. We worked more closely together to plan units that involved technology and incorporated as many of the boys’ personal connections as possible.

We learned that if we incorporate technology, the students’ engagement improves. We also have changed some of the instructional strategies we use. An example of one of our new strategies includes the inquiry approach. It allows more choice for the students and many of the personal connections can be taken into account.

When assessing student learning, we now give the students more choice and a voice. They decide whether they will create a slideshow or write an essay. They work to their own strengths in order to demonstrate their knowledge as effectively as they can. It allows them a little more ownership over their work and they can make use of the technology they prefer.

Student Quote:
During a reading survey, boys were asked, “Do you feel that you were more engaged in assignments when you were able to use technology? One student answered,

“Heck yes! Technology makes it interesting. Instead of hurtin’ your wrist and writing it down. I get ink all over my hand and it gets me all upset. Then I can’t concentrate. The computer makes it easier to get work done.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?
In analyzing our school data, we found that the gap between male and female students widens as they proceed through the grades, with the males falling further behind. We needed to look at specific ways to reach our boys, particularly in the intermediate grades. Therefore, we started this project hoping to improve our grade 8 boys’ engagement with reading. We felt that if we could increase engagement, then an improvement in skills would follow. Our team included a grade 7 and a grade 8 teacher. We decided to track the boys in these classes. The following year, all of our target students were in grade 8. In our last year, we had a new group of grade 8 students.

We set out to establish the boys’ personal connections. The team began collecting data about attitudes towards reading. Using interest, attitude, and bookmark surveys, an increase in high interest and graphic novel books for the library, and observations, we determined that boys like to read certain genres, non-fiction, and magazines. We also noticed that they will take suggestions from their peers when looking for reading material, and they would often casually discuss what they had read. The boys also told us that they liked to use computers to do assignments. Once we had established what the personal connections were, we began to use them in the classroom. We purchased Mac Book laptops, digital still and video cameras, and a SMART Board.

Our major highlights/successes: We saw the boys’ engagement with the technology. The boys’ were taking initiative by requesting additional time to finish assignments. Boys began asking for more time to read independently. Their enthusiasm towards the technology was constant. Even after using it for some time, their interest did not waiver. We heard (and overheard) the boys dialogue with their peers about what they were reading in Literature Circles and during independent reading time. As educators, we received, learned, and used new technology. We worked collaboratively with grade partners, our SERT, and our teacher-librarian. The students learned to use the technology and the different programs available on the Mac laptops, often with little instruction. We teachers learned a lot from the boys and we have taken what we learned and begun implementing it consistently. The boys knew they were part of the research and that empowered them. Knowing that they had priority over the technology seemed to increase their enthusiasm toward it. They really seemed to appreciate having an alternative to written assignments.

Our challenges: We did not have a group of intermediate students that we could track over the whole three years. We lost team members and added new ones throughout the years. Getting the technology took longer than we had anticipated. We ran into supervision issues with the computers and cameras and we had to come up with strategies to help us deal with that. Having enough funds to meet as a team as frequently as we wanted and needed was also a challenge.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?
There are many things we would like to do in the future now that we have learned so much from our research. We want to continue expanding our library collection of books for boys and allowing them input into that collection. We will continue our use of bookmarks and incentive draws. They give us valuable information and the students enjoy them. We have expanded the bookmarks to our grade 7 students and, next year, we hope to include grade 6 students. We have started building capacity within our school and we will continue to do so. As we are a large school, we will need to expand our collection of technology in order to share computers with everyone. To effectively build capacity, we would like to offer professional development on using laptops and other technology in the classrooms. Finally, we will encourage the use of technology across the curriculum and grade levels.

As we have gone through this process, we have answered many questions but we still have several more, including:
• If we had used younger students and had followed them throughout the three years, would our results be different?
• Now that we know how to engage boys, how can we use their interest to improve their marks?
• How can we use our teacher-librarian more effectively? Having one who is available full-time to offer support, give PD on the use of technology, and teach research skills would be extremely beneficial for students’ critical literacy skills.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
“My son has always preferred to use technology. His language grades have improved from grade 7 to grade 8 because he has had the opportunity to use computers more at school.”

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Qualitative:

Anecdotal observations were the most effective for us. They showed what the students were doing at various times of the day and we were able to note that they were actually reading during independent reading time. Our notes showed that the students were having conversations about what they were reading and were demonstrating a positive disposition towards reading. For example, one rather reluctant reader asked another boy whether he was finished with a book yet, because he wanted to borrow it. They often recommended titles and shared books with one another.

We saw that, because engagement was up, behaviour issues were minimal. The boys didn’t have time to act up because they were engrossed in their tasks. The boys put more effort into their work and often asked for more time so they could go back and improve or revise what they had done. They took more pride in their work and everyone wanted to present their work first. The boys were sometimes more comfortable on the computers than were the girls and, more than once, they would finish their work and then help other students with their work.

We also did reading surveys in different forms. We used bookmarks as quick, frequent surveys and students interviewed each other on podcasts. The answers the boys gave were both interesting and informative. From their answers, we determined that we were on the right track with technology and personal connections regarding reading. The podcast surveys told us that they do prefer to use technology, if given the choice. Their responses included, “tech is easy and fun” and “on the computer you can make it better than if you just did it on bristol board”. The boys also told us that using technology at school has increased their use of it at home and they like to make movies and slideshows of things they do outside of school.

The responses from the bookmarks showed us that the majority of boys are choosing books that are age appropriate and they are finishing the books that they have chosen. They prefer fantasy, non-fiction, adventure, sports, and war books. They now choose books in different ways, including reading the back of the book, taking recommendations from peers and teachers, and flipping through and skimming a couple of pages.

Quantitative:

We looked at different performance tasks when collecting quantitative data. During a recent unit on heroes, the students had to write a persuasive essay about their hero and do a presentation about the same hero. They were given the choice of how they would present their hero to the class and all of the boys chose to use technology in some capacity. Most presented slideshows, but all of them used the Mac Books to create their presentations. One student did not submit the written essay, but did well on the presentation. When we compared their marks for the essay with their marks for the presentation, the results were telling. The average for the essay was 62.7% but, for the presentation, the average was 76.7%. This is an increase of 14%!

We also used DRA results. We found that, for each group of students we tracked, there was a decline in overall levels when students completed the DRA test. One of our main findings was that the personal connections are very important for boys and that they are more engaged when these connections have been considered. The main connections we identified are: interesting topics, choice, the chance to talk, and the use of technology. We feel that the lower DRA scores resulted from the lack of these personal connections. For the DRA test, the boys had little or no choice in what they read, the topics were not boy-friendly, the boys did not have the opportunity to discuss the reading at all, and the boys were required to write their answers, rather than use technology to get their ideas across.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

1. Our data showed us that there are four main personal connections for boys that will impact their productive disposition:

   A) Topics that interest them will hook them right from the beginning. If they like what they are learning, they are more engaged in it. We found that they really enjoyed studying heros, Greek mythology, and World War 1.

   B) Choice helps to engage them. Let them choose not only reading material, but the method they use to demonstrate their learning for assessment. During literature circles, students were free to choose the book they would discuss with their circle. They enjoyed being able to tell each other about what they were reading. They were also given the option of completing tasks with pen and paper or using technology. The boys chose to use computers whenever they could.

   C) The boys appreciate the chance to talk about what they are reading and their ideas. They like to share informally.

   D) The opportunity to use technology whenever possible keeps their interest up and allows them to best demonstrate their learning. As we’ve already stated, when given the choice, boys choose technology over written assignments.

2. We found that, although the group of students we tracked changed (because the original group graduated), the personal connections remained the same and just as effective. They still seemed to choose the same genre of books and were still interested in similar unit topics.

3. The boys are reading more than they were and are choosing appropriate materials. They are also finishing most of what they choose. If they do abandon a book, most can explain why they did so.

4. The boys talked about their reading and their work if given the opportunity and sometimes even on their own and unprompted. They participated actively during literature circles and engaged in several discussions among themselves.

5. When given the choice, boys almost always chose to use technology (usually a MacBook) to complete assignments and present information to the class.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

6. We learned that, when we didn’t take these personal connections into account when planning or instructing, we saw scores go down. This occurred when students wrote the DRA, as well as for some performance tasks.

![Comparison of Final Marks](image)

7. Because they were more engaged in their work, the boys tended to put more effort into what they were doing. They took a little more pride in the final product and this often resulted in more success. They used their time more effectively and were on task more often.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

The project has changed the way we plan and instruct. We have learned a lot of valuable information from our research and we try to consciously incorporate it into our program. When beginning a new unit, we now consider where we can give the boys more choices and opportunities to talk about their reading and their work. We try to use technology whenever possible, in many different ways. In order to achieve this, we have begun to work more collaboratively. Grade partners plan together, but we have also started to use our teacher-librarian and literacy teacher more effectively.

We listen to our students more. Through podcast surveys or something as simple as the bookmark surveys, we can see what their interests and attitudes are and we can use that information when planning our instruction. Their opinions are valuable and help us plan and assess. This information also helps us determine the kinds of materials that will engage our boys.

"As a teacher-librarian, I feel empowered because I am learning how to implement new and innovative teaching strategies using technology. I am using this new knowledge to teach other teachers, as well as students. Also, I have been interested in boys' literacy since I began my assignment as teacher-librarian six years ago. Since I have taken over the library, I have been dedicated to developing our collection so that students can find a book that is just right for them. As a member of the boys' literacy team, I have made it a priority to concentrate on increasing the selection of high-interest books including fiction and non-fiction. I have had the intermediate students pick books from our book fair for our library. I have made a primary non-fiction section so that primary students do not get "lost" in the thousands of non-fiction titles around the library. I have also purchased many, many graphic novels which have grabbed the eyes of junior boys especially". Janet Keilhack

"As a grade 6 teacher, it was interesting to see the dynamics of a grade 8 literacy program. Through this action research and working closely with grade 8 teachers, I was able to incorporate the inquiry process, the technology, and the four key elements of personal connections towards reading in my own classroom. I have noticed a tremendous difference in engagement in my literacy program." Tammy Green

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Any of the My Story series about World War I and World War II
The Darren Shan series about vampires
The Bone series by Jeff Smith
MacBooks and technology of any kind

For professional development:
Me Read? No Way! — Ontario Ministry of Education
Engaging Readers and Writers with Inquiry by Jeffrey Wilhelm
In Graphic Detail and Reading Doesn’t Matter Anymore by David Booth
When Kids Can’t Read by Kylene Beers

Team Member Quote:
“This has been a very beneficial activity for me as a teacher. I feel that I have drastically changed the way I teach and that the students are getting more from my class than ever. The use of technology in the classroom has boosted the engagement level and now I rarely deal with behaviour issues during our literacy block. The boys are putting more effort into their work and their marks are beginning to reflect this change.”

Administrator Quote:
“As Vice-Principal, a large part of my job is dealing with issues that come to the office. Since the implementation of the technology in the grade 8 classrooms, the number of office referrals during the afternoon literacy block has dropped drastically. This shows me that the students are too busy and too engaged to create problems in the classroom. Classes that stick to paper-and-pencil activities are still having behavioral issues during their literacy blocks.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
personal connections, choice, technology, talk, topics
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Toronto District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
West Glen Junior School

Kindergarten – Grade 5

Inquiry participants: All boys from Grade 1 to Grade 5, including 3 self contained classrooms.

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
2005-2007:
S. Bois - Principal
K. Norton - Literacy Co-ordinator
J. Allen - Gr. 3/4 Teacher
J. Cataudella - Gr. 5 Teacher
A. Paulionis - Gr. 1/2 Teacher
K. Yates – ESL & Reading Recovery Teacher
M. Sievert - Kindergarten Teacher
L. Sloan - Librarian
2007-2008:
J. Lang - Principal
A. Paulionis - Literacy Co-ordinator & MART
J. Allen - Gr. 3/4 Teacher
J. Cataudella - Gr. 5 Teacher
K. Yates – ESL & Reading Recovery Teacher

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
**Essential Question:** Over a two year period (Spring 06-Spring 08), what are the trends in boys' attitudes towards reading specifically related to:
  a) how much they like reading and 
  b) their reading ability?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:
- incorporate drama and visual arts into the reading program
- have a male student read aloud a picture book to the class
- team teaching and co-teaching
- intentional teaching
- narrow the focus
- increase the use of big books
- create anchor charts/visuals and post in the classroom
- clear and explicit teaching
- use ICT to demonstrate learning (Kidspiration and Inspiration)
- guided reading with specific boy-oriented resources (non-fiction)
- shared reading (Skyrider and Let's Talk About It posters)
- think/pair/share
- teachers received oral first steps training
- provide a multi-media experience — visuals and cartoons
- implement the All Star Reading Program
- reading buddies once a week — the primary students meet with a junior student to read a story
- newstelling
- focus on inferring and higher level questioning
- use non-fiction books during “read aloud”
- provide students with graphic novels, comics, and non-fiction books for D.E.A.R (Drop Everything and Read) time

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**
- used the attitude survey information to assist students in choosing a book to take home
- used the attitude survey to heighten awareness of how boys respond and demonstrate their learning
- created a classroom library that includes non-fiction books
- exposed students to non-fiction texts
- used anchor charts and props in the classroom
- posted rubrics in the classroom
- took professional development opportunities
- planned lessons with grade teams
- co-taught with literacy coach and literacy co-ordinator
- had high expectations for students’ achievement
- provided consistent and constructive feedback to students
- actively engaged the students in the activity (i.e., role playing)
- increased our awareness of need for differentiated instruction
- provided opportunities for boys to work with different teachers apart from their homeroom teacher

**Student Quote:**

“When I read an adventure book, I feel like I’m part of the adventure. I become excited and want to keep reading the book. After I read the book, I learn new words and new things. Reading is fun!” (Grade 2 student)
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

West Glen has been tracking the reading progress of each student for several years. Since September 2004, we have created a Data Wall, using letter identification and DRA and CASI results. The Data Wall has provided us with a visual representation of the reading behaviors and success of all our students. What we found in our initial data collection was a definite gap in reading levels between boys and girls in the primary grades, and a distinct variation in reasoning, communication, organization, and the application of conventions in the junior grades. The question that we focused on in 2005 was: If boys have easy access to books and texts that are distinctively geared to their interests and if they are given the opportunities to express their learning in ways that match their cognitive approach to learning, will their achievement and attitude towards reading improve?

In an attempt to build teacher capacity, we learned about a new assessment tool, the Flynn-Cooter Reading Inventory in the Classroom. After administering this assessment two times, we determined that this was not a successful assessment tool for us because it did not provide any deeper insight into our readers. We then turned to a reading attitudes questionnaire found in Literacy Assessment Manual-Primary (LAMP), TDSB 2003, which was adapted from On Solid Ground by Sharon Taberski. Once the results were gathered and analyzed, we continued to see a need to change the original assessment of boys’ attitudes. This attitude survey was too complex for students to independently complete. Therefore, as a staff, we revised the attitude survey so it would reflect our student population and provide us with a better understanding of what our boys liked to read. We found that this teacher created attitude survey provided us with information that was much more insightful and useful in planning our next steps.

Our overall plan for this inquiry project was to: (1) increase teacher capacity related to boys' literacy instruction; (2) improve boys' attitudes towards reading; (3) raise boys' reading achievement; and (4) provide a wealth of non-fiction texts, graphic novels, magazines, and comic books that would encourage and support boys' literacy.

A highlight of our work was collaborating with the staff on a regular basis and creating new programs and initiatives such as the Boys Book Club and Guys Read program. The community/parent support for these two programs was incredible. A challenge of our work was the transition of staff from year to year, as well as the changeover of students in the school. The literacy co-ordinator played a vital role, in familiarizing the staff with the new programs, professional resources, and newly purchased resources for boys (e.g., non-fiction books and graphic novels).

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

We will continue to do the following: Guys Read Program; Professional Book Club with boys’ literacy focus; co-teaching with Literacy Co-ordinator and TDSB model school literacy coach; reflect on our instructional practices and how to better meet the needs of our boys; track boys’ attitudes and achievements through the use of our teacher developed Reading Attitude Survey and DRA and CASI data; and, familiarize staff with new professional resources.

As we continue to focus on boys’ literacy and reflect in our Professional Learning Communities, various questions emerge and suggest areas to further explore next year. These include:

a) What else can we do to close the gap between home and school?
b) Should we create a parent survey that would provide us with information about students' reading behaviours at home?
c) Should we have an area in the library that is a “boys only” zone?
d) Should the newly purchased “boys” books be housed in the classrooms?
e) Should we involve the boys in purchasing and choosing reading materials that match their preferences?

Parent/Guardian Quote:
‘The new boys’ literacy materials that the school has purchased really hit the mark. All boys are not the same, yet our three sons are equally drawn to non-fiction, science-oriented materials, magazines, and graphic novels. All of these are now easily accessible and available at West Glen school.” (Mother of three boys aged 10, 9 and 7)
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Our focus at West Glen for the past three years has been to improve reading achievement and attitudes towards reading. We began to collect quantitative data by administering and using DRA and CASI results. These data provided staff with information to create cross-grade and cross-class guided reading groups based on students' needs. However, upon reflection, it was the Reading Attitude Survey that provided us with the important information which guided our teaching practice to improve boys' attitudes towards reading. Through on-going dialogue in our Professional Learning Communities, we decided to use a Reading Attitude Survey to assess students' mind-sets and attitudes towards reading.

In 2005, the first survey we administered in the classrooms was the Flynt-Cooter Reading Inventory. This was administered once. However, our school-wide determined that, while it provided some interesting information, it did not provide us with meaningful data that could be used to inform our teaching practices. Therefore, we decided to try the TDSB LAMP reading survey and administered it to boys and girls a total of four times (twice in 2005/06 and twice in 2006/07). Upon reflection, we concluded that this survey provided some very good information, but there were no observable patterns in attitudes and differences between boys and girls. Due to the nature of the TDSB LAMP survey (too many choices and questions were not clear), we decided to develop our own survey so it would reflect our school-wide focus. A writing committee was formed to create a Reading Attitude Survey that would be easier for the students to answer and which would provide us with more qualitative data. Teachers researched a number of Reading Attitude Surveys found on-line and created a survey that we felt would meet our needs. After administering the teacher-created survey to the students, the staff's initial response was that it was easier to administer and that the students better understood what was being asked. The use of pictorial faces (happy face = I agree a lot, straight face = I agree a little, sad face = I disagree a lot) proved to be helpful and user friendly for the primary students.

### Reading Attitude Survey

For each sentence, colour the face that best describes how you feel about the statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am a good reader.</th>
<th>I agree a lot</th>
<th>I agree a little</th>
<th>I disagree a lot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I read to find out about things.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to read books with a partner.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to read on my own.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to read out loud to the class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to read at home for fun.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I choose books by my favourite author.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to talk about books with my friends.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learn new words when I read.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try to figure out what a book is about before I start reading.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use pictures and diagrams to help me understand a book.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)

As shown in the graphs above, our teacher-created Reading Attitude Survey administered in spring 2006 through spring 2008, indicates significantly that our boys have become more positively engaged in reading. Throughout the three-year period, teachers modeled effective instructional strategies and continuously shared their knowledge in their Professional Learning Communities. Teachers met on a regular basis to collaboratively plan lessons that focused on strategies for reading, writing, and comprehension. The strategies we implemented included the following:

- readers’ theater to develop fluency;
- boy-friendly culminating tasks after “read alouds”;
- colourful anchor charts posted in the classroom that not only supported the boys but captivated their interest;
- invitations to males in the community to read to the students;
- “retelling” to check comprehension;
- graphic organizers to support learning;
- “book talks” on non-fiction materials; and,
- modeled reading.

We believe that, through this collaboration and modeling, students used these early reading strategies to guide them in their enjoyment of reading.

Through further examination of the results, it became apparent that students do not like to read with a partner. This can be attributed to the need for more peer-reading and perhaps the need to create a buddy reading program between the Primary and Junior students.

Even though there was a slight decline in the data results for, “I Read To Find Out About Things”, there was an overall improvement since the Spring of 2006.

Our boys have been consistently reading selections from our Boys’ Literacy Collection such as graphic novels, non-fiction texts, and bold print magazines. There is significant improvement in academic knowledge of non-fiction texts and how to use elements of non-fiction to improve comprehension. The at-risk readers are now seeking assistance instead of avoiding reading. Our Grade 5 boys have become strong academic and social leaders in the school.

Perhaps the most interesting findings were how the modified teacher-created survey provided us with more useful information. Since the survey was more user-friendly for the students, we found that the students were able to independently and confidently complete the survey. We will continue to use this Reading Attitude Survey to track changes in boys’ reading attitudes in the future.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

The impact of this inquiry on educators was very positive. We became more aware of boys’ likes and dislikes. We gathered information that provided us with new ideas and strategies that were implemented in the classroom, such as including more non-fiction texts in “read-aloud” periods. We also purchased “appropriate” resources — e.g., graphic novels and joke books to teach non-fiction that further engaged boys’ in reading.

As a school team we met on a regular basis in our Professional Learning Communities to share knowledge of best teaching practices. This encouraged reflection and contributed to our professional knowledge and growth. The valuable time spent discussing the results of the Reading Attitude Survey and brainstorming ideas increased team work and, most importantly, supported our goal of student achievement.

The notable successes throughout this inquiry process were in observing the students’ excitement and reaction to having new books in the classroom geared towards their reading interests. It was very rewarding as an educator to watch boys’ attitudes towards reading begin to shift from negative (“I don't want to…” “Do I have to…”) to more positive (“Cool...did you read this book!”).

The challenge was finding a way to circulate some of the newly-purchased leveled boys’ books between classes and deciding whether to divide the boys’ books among all classroom libraries rather than housing them in one location — the book room.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
- graphic novels, comics, and non-fiction books in classroom libraries
- computer-internet access, Kidspiration, and Inspiration
- Ski Ryder posters
- QSP magazines

For professional development:
- teacher-created Reading Attitude Survey
- Tony Stead, “Non-Fiction K-3”
- Kathy Pike and Jean Mumper, “Making Nonfiction and Other Informational Texts Come Alive” Pearson

Team Member Quote:
‘Boys’ attitudes towards reading significantly improved this year with the implementation of the Guys Read Program. Boys need male role models to support their gender development. Having these male volunteers come to the classroom once a month and read to the students gave the boys the confidence and understanding that reading is “cool” and it’s not just for girls. This is truly a successful and beneficial program for boys and should be implemented across the province.”

Administrator Quote:
“Research tells us that we need to instruct male readers in such a way that promotes interest and eventually a love of reading. This requires specific resources and creative instructional strategies that not only engage but spark enthusiasm among our boys. This inquiry provided the necessary lens for our teachers to respond appropriately through a collaborative approach to instruction that has resulted in improved teaching practice and attitudes towards reading.”
(Principal of West Glen School)

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
Boys, Reading Attitude Survey, research, Boys Book Club, Guys Read Program
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Toronto District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
West Hill Collegiate Institute – Grades 9-12

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Penny Young
Niki Mitsopoulos
Elena Ioannou

For a variety or reasons, the final team has only one original member.
Essential Question:
If we give boys time in which to read and choice in reading material, will they read more and will literacy rates improve?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:
We confirmed that choice is a big factor. Our student book shopping trips have taken on a life of their own and are now a part of the school culture. Teachers and Vice Principals recommend who might profit from being involved in these selection excursions. The students who come have taken it upon themselves to “take orders” from their peers and seem to enjoy their role. These students, some of whom rarely signed out books before helping in the selection process, have taken it upon themselves to promote their selections and bring in other students to see “their books”. When we polled the student body at-large about how they make their book selections from the school library, they said that recommendations from other students and the bookplates acknowledging which student selected the book and word of mouth were big factors.

We also learned that reading habits morph. Having tracked a cohort of grade 9P boys into grade 10P, we have discovered that many of the boys have developed as their interests and abilities mature. We were alarmed at first glance when comparing the number of books signed out in grade 10 versus grade 9 for our cohort. Our grade 9 boys did a lot of short “pick up” reading of materials such as manga/graphic novels, Boldprint thematic scrapbooks, magazines and newspapers. They still read the manga and magazines, but have started to include other genres like mystery and fantasy, as well as non-fiction biographies, sport books and computer strategy guides. We have been surprised to note that by the end of grade 10, boys have developed an interest in philosophical “self help” books and even some fresh modern poetry. While the actual number of items read may have lessened by grade 10, the material chosen has become more substantial.

Finally, we have learned that our own students can be our greatest allies when promoting literacy. The “avid readers” will start a buzz about an author or a particular book, and it will fly off the shelf. Boys, even weak readers, who have been asked for advice become advocates. They take pride in being acknowledged for whatever is their area of expertise.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

The English Department has started to adapt to the changing interests and demographics of the school as part of our literacy adventure. For example, the Grade 9P teachers did a unit on graphic novels in order to engage the students. They read and wrote in the style of the genre. Some of the assessment with this unit was formative through observation and one-on-one assistance. Once the students were engaged, teachers had the students do computer research on Japanese culture. Reading and writing in the second segment was more traditional, as was assessment.

The senior English teachers are hoping to replace Brave New World (c1932) with The Kite Runner (c2004) as the novel study in Grade 12. The students will relate to the latter novel far more than they did to the former. In many subject areas, teachers are paying attention to the faces we see before us.

Given a choice, it is human nature to want to read and study “yourself”. The library has representative fiction and non-fiction for all groups. The new “Black History” course has generated a lot of reading activity because the students choose the course and are engaged in the information.
Within the library, we now pay much more attention to creating a teen-friendly visual space. Students see posters of themselves and others reading favourite books. Staff members give considerable thought to presentation, highlighting and focusing student attention on engaging materials. We have learned that boys in particular do not come into the library with much of an idea about what to read so we try to ensure that if they look the least bit lost or uncomfortable, we take them to reading material that we know will be successful for them. We encourage our student volunteers to take leadership and make their own recommendations.

**Student Quote:**
I want to go book shopping again next year for my library. It’s cool. (J.S.)
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

Our plan was to give students time to read and more input into what they were going to be reading. Time came from two sources. First, the principal facilitated keeping the library open at lunch time. Secondly, the school began a daily school wide reading program called “Relax and Read”. We provided choice by taking students, particularly the reluctant readers, book shopping. Choice was also a factor for a targeted group of weak readers who were involved in a program called “Read 180”. Early on in that program, students did a computerized interest inventory so that the computer could design a tailor made reading plan that addressed both the interest and reading level of each student. Our plan was to reduce the gender gap in terms of academic success, particularly in the area of literacy, but also curriculum wide since literacy is so fundamental to all areas of study.

Time has certainly been well used. The Vice Principal, Lynn Tidd, reports that “Relax and Read” is running well in most classes. Students line up every morning before school to renew or sign out new magazines, Boldprints, and books so that they are prepared for “R&R”. Teachers encourage the reluctant students by bringing in all sorts of interesting reading material to “pick up”. The Student Success Teacher took the time to consult with the teacher-librarians about what worked well with his students and subsequently ordered appropriate magazines for his room. The school subscribes in bulk to two newspapers, and they are snatched up early in the day. At lunchtime, the library is full. More than 50% of the users are males, mostly, but not exclusively, in grades 9 and 10. In a recent student survey, many of the students reported that they are in the library during lunch period two to four times a week. From the same survey, they indicated that they read during lunch period if they do not sign the material out to take home. One of the things we mark as a sign of success is the amount of material we have to reshelve after each lunch period.

The students who come shopping with us help us to gain an intimate understanding of their reading interests. This helps us when we shop without them present and helps us advise other teachers looking for new material. We still take the students shopping. It is now a school tradition. The buzz starts in September when students come to beg to be included. This is one of the most rewarding outcomes of this adventure. Students want to be involved. Students want to promote their choices to their peers. Students take pride in being our advisors and have taken ownership of their library. Some of the weakest students have become involved in our social reading clubs and reading events.

Our inquiry was only one part of a larger school wide initiative to improve literacy. “Read 180” pays special attention to students transferred, not promoted, from grade 8. Student Success classes, after school home help club and credit recovery all work in concert with the work being done in our inquiry. The gap is closing between boys and girls in grades 9 and 10 and our literacy scores have risen significantly over the past four years.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

We have evidence that boys are now reading nearly as often as girls in grades 9 and 10. Over the next two years, we will track the reading habits and literacy / English results of this cohort through grades 11 and 12. We will continue developing the strategies we have been using, but will address the older students as they progress from our initial inquiry. Our goal for the up-coming years is to learn as much as possible about how we can assist boys to improve immediate academic literacy needs and also to develop life-long reading habits.

Due to the success of guest authors and speakers in inspiring students to expand their reading horizons, we will continue to bring such people into the school. In the past, we have had Alan Stratton, William Bell, Eric Walters and Lawrence Hill. Each of them has opened our students’ eyes to new aspects of current world issues and historical issues.

Parent/Guardian Quote: I have noticed that the library has a large array of boy-friendly materials. Authors like Anthony Horowitz and Gary Paulsen are well represented, and there are many genres available: such as mystery, fantasy and espionage to pique most appetites. It’s nice to see entire series present, as some people like to read about recurring characters, kind of like meeting old friends again. Recently, there has been more emphasis on graphic novels -- I love comics myself. Some materials are in larger print, which makes things more visually inviting for the reluctant reader. (S.R.)
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:
We have used EQAO test scores, TDSB’s Reportsmith (a program that analyzes circulation statistics by grade and gender), student surveys, and observation.

The EQAO Grade 10 Literacy Test results showed that, in 2002, 67% of students were successful. In 2004 and 2006, 74% were successful. The 2007 EQAO results for West Hill C.I. showed that 81.5% were successful (based on fully participating first-time eligible students). The results rose from 2002 to 2004, but plateaued from 2004 to 2006. Our inquiry began in mid 2006 and, since then, the results rose from the plateau to our all-time best result of 81.5% students successful.

Initially, our target group was grade 9 boys. Prior to the start of our inquiry, boys were signing out less material from the library than were the girls. Using Reportsmith, we discovered that in November 2005, grade 9 boys averaged one book, while girls averaged three. In November 2006, boys in grade 9 signed out an average of four books, while girls signed out an average of three books. In February 2007, shortly after our second boys’ shopping trip to the World’s Biggest Bookstore, a similar snapshot showed that the boys averaged ten sign-outs compared with six for girls. Note that in these early stages of the inquiry, there was still a gender gap for grades 10 –12. The snapshot taken in April 2008 showed that grade 9 boys averaged seven books, while girls averaged nine books. On face value, that would indicate that boys were losing ground, but through careful analysis of what the boys were choosing to read, we could see that many boys had moved from reading only graphic novels and magazines to reading substantial books which required more time to complete. In April 2008, grade 10 boys and girls both logged an average of nine books. Therefore, the gender gap has begun to close in grade 10. Our grade 11 and 12 students still show a considerable gender gap in reading habits. We will be monitoring this gap as our inquiry cohort moves up through grades 11 and 12.

Data from Reportsmith also tells us that 70% of our top ten readers this year are boys and they are mostly in applied level courses. Our “number one” top reader this year and last year is a young man “C.R.”. Last year, he read twice as many items as this year and we discussed this with him. He said that he’d read mostly graphic novels last year. However, this year, on our book buying trip, he said he discovered several series of fantasy and horror books. He says he has been devouring these books, but they take him longer to read. (A side bar – C.R. has generated a lot of interest in these series by telling his friends about them.) Other students from our top ten list followed a similar pattern, moving from many small reads to a few substantial ones. This supports a theory we had that if we can get the boys reading anything, they will eventually mature to read more substantial material.

Through observation, our Vice Principal, Lynn Tidd, reports that the “Relax and Read” program is working well. Nearly all classrooms are silent as students read material of their own choice for twenty minutes per day. The school provides 100 newspapers per day and all are eagerly snatched up each morning. From a survey that the “inquiry team” initiated, most of the respondents said that they frequently continued their “Relax and Read” book at home on their own time.

Also, through observation and conversation with students in the library at lunch time, we are aware that some students seldom sign out books from the library, but they do read for up to an hour a day within the library.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Our data shows that there is a perceptible increase in reading being done at West Hill C.I. This may contribute to the improved EQAO results. The graph below shows the percentage of first-time eligible students who fully participated and passed the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) since 2002. Providing students with books and other reading material that is of interest and relevant to them gets them started. Once started, many students take flight and seek out other types of material to read.

One unanticipated but positive event, revealed by Reportsmith data, that has occurred since we began our Boys' Literacy Inquiry, is that all students in all grades are reading more than they did before we began the inquiry. We attribute this outcome to: (1) "Relax and Read", (2) the library being staffed to be open at lunch, (3) the “buzz” generated by the guest authors, (4) Read posters, and (5) peer-to-peer word of mouth reviews. In addition, there has been a school-wide focus on literacy intervention with the Student Success initiative, essential level English for students who were transferred in without passing English in elementary school, and other support programs. There is an energy around literacy.
We have observed that for some students there really is a “tipping point” which enables them to move into higher levels of reading. For some students, this comes when the material is directly relevant to some aspect of their own lives. The challenge is to connect the right book to the right individual. When a visiting author discussing modern African history struck a chord with “R.C.”, this young man chose to read Shake Hands With the Devil by Romeo D’Allaire. He later reported that it was the first book he had ever read just because he wanted to. His sense of personal achievement was immense.

As a corollary, we can take this concept to all subject areas. If it is possible for students to be involved, invested and interested in what they are learning, the learning will be easier.
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

We have learned a variety of strategies that will help us to assist students in developing the literacy skills necessary for academic success. We recognize that the inquiry project required teamwork. If our efforts and those of other staff involved in student improvement serve to create a culture of literacy awareness, we will have made a difference.

We have realized how much we need to involve students in the decision making around what they will be reading. For personal reading, this is not too difficult to implement. The challenge, which is starting to be met, is for the reading materials in curricular areas such as English and the social sciences to reflect the students’ backgrounds, experiences and interests.

Actually, one of our best resources has been the boys themselves. They have told us a lot about themselves and their needs. We have established relationships with enough of our students that they will come to us with excellent ideas for materials that will excite their peers.

We know now that boys require more personal attention when selecting material to read. Unlike girls, many boys do not browse in a library. Boys profit from external guidance. They need someone or something to really sell them on a book. This can be provided by a teacher, a peer, a guest, a book club, a poster, or a display. As educators, we need to remember the value of marketing and also providing some pre-reading context to make it relevant to the reader.

We have provided more opportunities for students to read as a social activity through a variety of special interest reading clubs.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys: Graphic Novels, Computer Game Strategy Guides, Boldprint Books (Thomson/Nelson), magazines on sports, music, computers, and health.
In fiction collection, purchase numerous titles by popular authors and buy complete series of popular titles.

For professional development:
Boys and Literacy by Elizabeth Knowles and Martha Smith
Teen Genreflecting by Diana Tixier Herald
The Power of Reading by Stephen Krashen
Even Hockey Players Read: Boys, Literacy and Learning by David Booth.

Team Member Quote:
Getting kids to read is energy intensive but rewarding. (P.Y.)

Administrator Quote:
There’s a growing enthusiasm for reading. The kids are eager to grab the newspapers each day and I think they are gradually moving to heavier reading matter. (L.T.)

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
choice, time, involvement, graphic, relax and read
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Toronto District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Western Technical and Commercial School — ENG I L9 — Grade 9 essential level core (special education) English

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Cara Sullivan
Pam Evans
Katherine Rowland
**Essential Question:** How can we improve the reading scores for high school students with learning disabilities, poor attitudes towards learning, and chronic attendance problems?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

The Later Literacy Program is designed for one-on-one, daily instruction. It is not a viable option for improving boys’ literacy skills at the high school level. The concepts in the Later Literacy Program can improve teaching methods and give students an awareness of simple work attack strategies. The exigencies of the credit system obviate the success of the Later Literacy Program.

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

This project affected my teaching strategies significantly. Before taking the training for the Later Literacy Program, I had little idea how to teach a student who could not read. The Program taught me specific word attack strategies that the students appreciated and used.

In this final year of the project, I significantly modified the Later Literacy Program to fit the structure of a regular course credit. My assessment practices underwent little change.

**Student Quote:**

“I can read good.” — This student had reached high school reading at the grade 3 level. He was eager to go through the reading assessment. I used the Flynt-Cooter assessment tool. I was surprised and pleased to see that he scored at the grade 4 level. He was a difficult student who often skipped class, however, the testing experience seemed to give him heart.
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

In the spring of 2006, a fellow teacher approached me asking if I was interested in attending training for the Later Literacy Program being offered by Joyce Macdonald at a 3-day institute. Though I had taught English through Grades 7-13 for 20 years, I had recently been dismayed by my difficulty in helping our core special education essential level students. I felt that I had not received enough guidance from our board on granting of credits to students who were reading well below grade level. The Later Literacy Program seemed like a good way for me to start to build some essential skills.

The training was difficult and it took time for me to understand it properly. It was a challenge to find a structure within which to use the program — the credit system does easily accommodate daily one-to-one tutoring. I visited teachers at the Peel-Dufferin Catholic DSB who were using the Later Literacy methods in their core special education classes and found that they had student tutors and a committed group of teachers all trained in the methods.

In the first year of implementation, I decided to teach a designated reading course, not to students with special education needs who had received extensive service over the years, but to those students who had “fallen through the cracks”. I cobbled together a course for senior students, all of whom were either in the ESL program or had IEP’s. The students’ reading levels ranged from grade 2 to grade 6 and their attendance was an issue. This course was not offered again, as the class size was too small.

This year, I taught an essential level core grade 9 English course and used the Later Literacy Program methods. The students in this course were eager to find out about their reading levels and liked some of the Later Literacy strategies. I doubt; however, that their reading levels improved. Shelley Stagg Peterson of OISE/UT was very encouraging and made helpful suggestions for how to incorporate the methods.

I believe that lack of parent involvement was part of the problem. While every parent signed the release forms, I doubt that all checked to see that their children were reading every day — an essential part of the program.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

I truly enjoyed spending individual time with students assessing their reading. The students found it very interesting and they really paid attention to their reading strengths and weaknesses. It gave me a “handle” on their skills and I would like to repeat this experience.

I will certainly use some of the Later Literacy Program word attack strategies again whenever the need arises.

Parent/Guardian Quote:
The guardian of the student quoted above is his 27-year-old cousin. The student lives with relatives as his parents have been in another country for up to four years. The cousin was very engaged and very supportive of the Later Literacy Program and informed me that the student lived in a family where no one spoke English. However, they went for walks and talked “man-to-man”. I also communicated through a translator with an aunt, who made it clear that there was no one at home who could help the student with his reading. In a case such as this, I believe that the traditional Later Literacy Program is
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Student reading questionnaires revealed that only one of the students read for pleasure.

As shown in the chart below, Flynt Cooter reading assessments indicated reading levels ranging from grade 2 to grade 9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Mark in ENG IL9 Fall/Winter 2007-08</th>
<th>Absences</th>
<th>Lates</th>
<th>Flynt-Cooter Reading Assessment Fall 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>grades 7-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>grades 3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>grades 4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>grades 6-7</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>grade 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>grade 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Student dropped out in December 2007</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>grade 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>grades 2-3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Anecdotal Observations

Student A
This student was quite ill for much of the semester, but kept up with the work in the class. The student earned only two credits for the entire year and had a total of 65 absences and 92 lates. At age 10, she had an educational assessment. The OSR indicated long-standing learning difficulties and constant struggles with reading and writing, despite being provided with extra resources. Reading comprehension was judged as low average.

Student B
This student has a mild intellectual disability and seemed incapable of understanding basic writing forms (paragraphs) after taking ENG IL9 twice. Placement in a SES program may have been more suitable. For the culminating assignment, this 17-year-old student chose a Goosebumps book, but was unable to finish it, to clearly explain the plot, or to give a coherent chapter summary. The Later Literacy Program methods were of no appreciable help to her. She graduates this year with an Ontario Secondary School Certificate (OSSC).

Student C
This student had a very rocky start to his high school career. His low reading level is complicated by living in a family where English is not spoken. He made a strong effort to improve in the last few weeks of school and worked hard at his grade 2 level independent novel. His Flynt-Cooter assessment gave him a higher reading level; however, he was anxious about his performance and I allowed him to read at a lower level. His educational assessment at age 7 showed the presence of a language-based learning disability, with a composite reading score in the 9th percentile.

Student D
This student was average, pleasant, capable, but not very hard-working. At age 10, he was diagnosed with a learning disability and a reading level at grade 3. With just a little more application, he could have achieved much more in class. However, the excitement of starting high school and the expanded social life enticed him. He did not consider that he had reading difficulties; however, he was very eager to see his Flynt-Cooter test results and was pleased with them.
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?
DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA: (cont.)

Student E
This student was capable, but had a poor work ethic. His written work was uneven, especially when his mother was involved. He has a language-based learning disability. An educational assessment at age 12 indicated reading comprehension below the first percentile. This information was a surprise, since he freely participated in class discussions about texts.

Student F
This student was a very capable reader who was probably misplaced in essential level English. He did not have the confidence to move into applied level in first semester in high school, but has now registered for applied level in grade 10. He attempted to read Chocolate War by Robert Cormier, but found the material too dark and difficult. He then switched to That Was Then This Is Now and was quite capable of reading it. This student occasionally used Later Literacy Program word attack strategies. When tested at age 10, he placed average in reading.

Student G
This student would have been better placed in an applied level course. Since a timetable change was not possible, I designed a separate course for him within the class. He enjoyed reading work by S.E. Hinton and worked well for a few weeks. However, personal problems intervened and he dropped out. This spring, he was enrolled in a Section 19 school and hopes to return to Western Technical and Commercial School this fall. He did not require the Later Literacy Program methods. When tested at age 8, he scored very low at the 3rd percentile in reading. However, this test result does not match his reading and writing skills I have observed.

Student H
This student suffers from a severe language communication disability; he is disgraphic and uses Kurzweil to read and write. He has failed grade 9 essential level core English twice. After doing a great deal of work with him in the Resource Room in the second semester, he was able to read and summarize chapters in a grade 3 or 4 Orca novel. I drilled and drilled him in different writing forms such as poetry, paragraphs, and point form. He will attempt to earn two English credits and graduate with an Ontario Secondary School Certificate (OSSC). The Later Literacy Program methods did not seem to improve his word attack capabilities.

Note:
Western Technical and Commercial School has one of the largest Special Education programs in the Toronto District School Board. We have 300 identified students in the school. Most of them take regular classes, along with resource room or learning strategies support in the early years of high school. Seventy-five of these students are enrolled in our core program, in which we offer grade 9 and 10 essential and applied level English, history, geography, mathematics, science, and careers and civics. We occasionally add integrated technology and family studies as options. Class sizes are capped at 15 and many classes have an educational assistant.

Our essential level grade 9 classes are full of students who are reading below grade level. We need more guidance about granting credits to these students. We have concluded that if we can get these students to pass the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) by grade 12, we are doing very well.

There is some talk about implementing a reading course at our school. However, the bureaucratic demands of the credit system seem to trump the needs of the students every time. The EQAO testing program puts ridiculous pressures on teachers and students and does not, in my opinion, assist in improving students’ reading and writing skills.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

I believe that, while the Later Literacy Program methods can ease the pain and embarrassment associated with reading for many of our identified students, it cannot, within the regular school credit system, have any appreciable effect on raising students’ reading levels. It is not easy to prove, but using the Later Literacy Program methods may have helped the students achieve good work at their own reading levels.

I would love to find out if the true use of the Later Literacy Program could improve a learning disabled student’s reading and writing abilities. Perhaps when I retire and tutor students, I can try it and see!
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

- Some good revisions of teaching practices.
- More confidence and patience in working with slow readers.
- Frustration at the system, which moves poor readers into a test-driven high school atmosphere with little opportunity for effective remediation.
- Resignation at the difficulty of improving reading scores for students with reading disabilities, poor attitudes toward learning, and chronic attendance problems.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
The books by Eric Walters, especially *Stuffed*
*That Was Then, This Is Now* by S. E. Hinton

For professional development:
Flynt Cooter Reading Inventory for the Classroom

Team Member Quote:

Administrator Quote:

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
Later Literacy Program; reading; graphic novels; choral reading; reading questionnaire
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Toronto District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Whitney Public School – Junior Division

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Tracey O’Toole
Carole Mandel
**Essential Question:** Can a comprehensive literacy program of non-fiction and fiction materials, selectively suited to meet the interests and needs of young male readers, improve their reading scores?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

Our boys' literacy project has, above all, strengthened and reinforced all our original ideas about how to inspire boys' reading. More specifically, our findings highlight the importance of:

- male mentors, authors, and other non-teachers in students' lives to talk about reading and writing and also to discuss how reading and writing are relevant and important in the lives and careers of boys;
- teachers choosing reading materials especially for boys;
- readily available materials such as books and magazines that appeal to boys in classroom and school libraries and that are used for literature circles;
- literature circles for boys, because they provide an opportunity to discuss and share opinions and provide a sense of empowerment when boys lead discussions and take ownership for the direction of discussions;
- both mixed and homogeneous gendergroupings for literature circles and other classroom programs; and
- improving reading skills through community programs such as Reading with Male Mentors (Dads Read), because a family and school connection with an emphasis on reading and love of books allows for the involvement of all stakeholders (i.e., teachers, parents, grandparents, administrators, and other staff members).

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

Since many boys find it a challenge to demonstrate their reading comprehension through written responses, it is important to provide boys with opportunities to demonstrate their learning in other ways. Therefore, because of the oral component, literature circles are a fundamental strategy because they allow boys to discuss rather than only write about a selected text.

When a student loves the book he is reading, a more valid assessment of his skills can be made, in contrast to when a student has no or little interest in a book.

Graphic novels are relevant and important forms of literature and should be readily available to all students. Graphic novels should be considered as important as any other classroom text.

Power Magazines and Yes Magazines can play an important role in a literacy program that appeals to boys.

**Student Quote:**

“I really enjoy it because I like meeting authors and I normally get hooked on their books. I realize that reading is fun and important.”

“I really enjoy literature circles because there is always great books.”

“It makes it very great to have books I like in literature circle because the homework is more fun and entertaining.”

“I really liked it when different male teachers came and read comics and poetry to Boys Book Club.”
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

When we submitted our proposal three years ago, we intended to develop classroom libraries, improve our literature circle programs in the junior division (by ensuring that we provided students with titles that appealed to them), and make the library available to families once a month before school hours to read (while providing coffee and snacks). However, the project has taken on a life of its own and has become a part of daily life at Whitney School.

The following are some of the wonderful features of our project and constitute our story:

- We have had many outstanding Canadian authors visit our school and speak to the students and parents such as Robert Munsch, Eric Walters, Eric Wilson, D.J. Steinburg, Dennis Lee, and Richard Scrimger. Richard Scrimger not only presented to the entire school, he also visited two classrooms where the children were reading his novels in literature circles.
- We have had male mentors visit and speak about the importance of reading in their professions such as Rick Carlton (illustrator) and Brent Johnson (CFL football player).
- We developed a graphic novel literature circle program.
- We developed a partnership with a local bookstore that provided books at a reduced rate and facilitated author visits.
- We organized a grade 4-5 Boys Book Club and took students to the TDSB Boys Literacy Conference.
- We spent time consulting with librarians and bookstore owners to develop a comprehensive list of titles that appeal to boys (e.g., fiction, non-fiction, graphic novels, poetry, and magazines). We used this list to stock classroom libraries and organized them to make the titles easily available.
- We worked closely with a parent committee of volunteers.
- We developed a list of favorite book titles recommended by teachers and support staff that appeared in the school's newsletter over the course of the year.
- We requested the grade 6 students to recommend their favorite books and created a display that featured the titles.
- We purchase Power Magazines at the grades 4, 5 and 6 levels.
- We held a school-wide contest to win Toronto Raptor's tickets. To win, children had to submit a sample of writing describing why they love to read.
- We developed an on-line survey that was completed by parents and boys to collect feedback about the impact of the project.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

We plan to:

- develop a powerpoint presentation to share our initiative and findings with other teachers and professionals;
- facilitate the continuation of the Reading with Male Mentors program;
- continue to assist colleagues in selecting titles that appeal to boys;
- join the School Improvement Planning and Review Committee next year as many of our initiatives have become part of our school improvement plan;
- continue our relationship with the local bookstore, Mabel's Fables; and
- continue to welcome visiting authors to our school.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

"Our whole family has attended Dad's Read. It is very valuable. By having boys go to school early in the morning to read with their fathers, we are sending a very positive message to them that reading is fun and important. It's usually Moms at school."

"It is the best half-hour of the week!"

"100% change. My son did not enjoy reading before. The program introduced him to non-fiction and boy-oriented fiction as well as male role models. His interest in reading has blossomed. He seldom watches TV before bed, he now reads novels."
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

Our data is based on spring and fall CASI results for 2006-07 and 2007-08 and report card marks in reading over the same period of time.

At the end of three-year project, we had 23 boys that remained at our school.

**Report Card Marks**
When the fall 2006 and spring 2008 report card marks are compared, there is improvement as follows:

- 14 of the 23 (61%) boys improved their marks for reading and six of the 14 improved a full grade level (i.e., C to B);
- 6 of the 23 (26%) boys remained the same in the reading marks; and
- 3 of the 23 (13%) boys had slightly lower marks (i.e., B+ to B).

**CASI Results**
When the fall 2006 and spring 2008 CASI results are compared, there is improvement as follows:

- 18 of the 23 (78%) boys improved. Four of the 18 improved by two levels (i.e., level 1 to level 3) and the other 14 improved by one level;
- 3 of the 23 (13%) boys remained the same at level 3; and
- 2 of the 23 boys had CASI scores that were lower and were boys that also had lower report card marks.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

The impact on us as educators is:

- a greater understanding of the importance of working collaboratively and as a team;
- a new understanding of the importance of many people in a school community supporting children and their reading (It Takes a Village);
- a heightened recognition of gender differences in learning and how to support this as educators;
- a new knowledge about the potential of every single student to excel in their reading and to love books;
- a change in the perception of what constitutes quality literature in the classroom; and
- a new appreciation of the need for school libraries to be the literacy heart of the school.

Author Quotes:
When visiting our school, Robert Munsch said: “I support the boys’ literacy program and I am happy to help out. It all makes so much sense.”

Another male author when speaking to parents and children at a Reading with Male Mentors event said: “Wow, this is an amazing program and I am going to be sure to mention this to the many, many schools that I visit all over Canada.”

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys: The Dangerous Book for Boys by Hal Iggulden; Trailblazers of the Modern World Series (World Almanac Library); The Biography series “Who Was...” (Short Books); Out From Boneville Series by Jeff Smith; Classic Graphic Series; Hugh Brewster’s books such as On Juno Beach; non-fiction titles by Linda Granfield; any books by the following Canadian authors: Eric Wilson, Eric Walters, Deborah Ellis, Richard Scrimger, and Dennis Lee; The Alex Rider Series by Anthony Horowitz; Power Magazines; Yes Magazines

For professional development:
Gender Matters by Leonard Saxe
The Mind of Boys by Michael Gurian
What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning by James Paul Gee
Boys of Few Words by Adam J. Cox

Team Member Quote:
“The joke is that Bay Street is going to shut down this morning because they are all reading to their boys…. the idea is to keep reading cool and fun, and to keep the boys interested.” — Carole Mandel as quoted in the Town Crier on February 2007 in reference to the school’s monthly Reading with Male Mentors program (Dads Read).

Administrator Quote:
“The project leaders, through their project’s design and implementation, have provided many memorable opportunities and experiences for the school and community; that excited and challenged boys about reading and writing”
— Principal Nancy Jonasson

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
reading with male mentors (Dads Read); graphic novel literature circles; author visits; Power Magazines; Yes Magazines
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Toronto District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Wm. G. Davis Junior Public School – Kindergarten to Grade 6

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Karen Lim, Rosalie Ray, Demetra Panagopolous, Shawna McMulkin, Natasha Cardoso, Sue Mailhot, Lora Agostino, Cathie Donald, Dave Budd, Rita Rowan, Pam Moore, Nanor Sagherian, Allyson Jeffery, Wendy Hall, Shawn Lalonde, Greg Telenko, Patti Biergard, School Council Members

This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education

teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca
Essential Question:
Will raising the profile of male role models reading at home through a Book Bag program and at school with special events and Boys’ Book Clubs improve boys’ attitudes toward reading and student achievement?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?
The following are the most important findings to improve boys’ literacy emerging from our inquiry:

1) I believe that the number one priority is to change teachers’ ideas of good literature for boys. There are many teachers who insist that their children read “quality” literature. Of course, children must be exposed to quality literature but we have discovered that boys learn best when they enjoy the books they read. We need to allow the students to read more non-fiction and silly, humorous books. Classroom libraries should include magazines and comics. The male students in my class always choose the science books, joke books, magazines, and silly books. They love the Bold Print books and search books. Young boys who used to waste independent reading time are now eager to get books to read.

2) It is very important to have a partnership between the home, school, and community. One can’t work in isolation of the others. Parents need to be welcomed to participate in their sons’ learning. It is interesting to note that so many fathers participated in our Male Role Model Day. Men do want to be included in their children’s education. Also, with some effort, we were able to find presenters (paid and voluntary) to link their presentations to the importance of literacy in their careers.

HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?

Our school team met regularly to participate in a professional book club. We also did a lot of professional development. Now, we all use the same terms. We worked with Debbie Miller’s Reading For Meaning and this year we are doing 6+1 Traits for writing. We also use lots of graphic organizers. All staff use the same vocabulary and a consistency of practice that is aligned with Ministry curriculum and best practices in literacy. We are beginning to see a lot of progress as the children go from grade to grade. We also had lots of opportunities to share our best practices on assessment with our own staff and with other schools in our area.

Our Literacy Room, library, and classroom libraries now have many great books that interest all of our students. Teachers now have a great selection of books to do “Read Alouds”. We have found that the boys in our classes are much more engaged in all of our reading activities.

Student Quotes:
Some of the boys who participated in our Boys’ Book Clubs said the following:
“This is the best ever. Thanks for letting us play games.” J. “Thank you, Mrs. R., for spending time on lunch to do activities. Thank you.” A. “Thank you for teaching us about all different sports.” D. “Thank you very much for boys’ literacy and getting everything set up. I will sign up again so THANK YOU.” R. “How did you make up the boys’ literacy clubs? Thank you for the activities.” D. “I like the Boys’ Book Club and thank you for letting me join.” L. “Thank you, Mrs. R., for doing cool activities with us.” N.
WHAT IS OUR STORY?

We were delighted to be chosen for this initiative. We began by purchasing books — that would interest our boys — for our library, classrooms, and Literacy Room. We purchased many new “Read Alouds” that appeal to boys for the staff to share. We set up book bags for each child to take home, many Boys’ Book Clubs, a Male Role Model Day, and a myriad of guest speakers. We organized visits from community members to share their jobs and the importance of literacy. These included police officers, firefighters, a vet, a paramedic, news anchors — Tom Hays and Mark Dailey, authors — Eric Walters and Peter Cook, cartoonists — Log McQuaig and Blac Ice, and representatives from sports teams such as the Toronto Marlies. Our boys also participated in a Boys’ Literacy Conference and had the opportunity to meet R. L. Stine.

Our overall plan was to get the children motivated to read and involve fathers and the community. I think the major highlight was the Male Reading Role Model Days. All three events we have hosted so far were very successful and many fathers attended. The fathers seemed very pleased to be personally invited to attend and read with their children or a small group of children. Many of them enjoyed the opportunity of a special day to get involved with their children. This has now become an annual event at our school which, we have expanded to include any Reading Role Models.

“My husband also participated in activities surrounding the Boys’ Literacy Program. He participated in the Male Role Model Day held at the school. He read a story to my son and some of the other students. He then talked with them about his job and how he uses literacy in performing the requirements of his job. Since I usually attend most functions at the school, my husband was very happy to have the opportunity to interact with the children and my son was very proud to have his father at school. Overall, my son’s experiences in the Boys’ Literacy Program were very positive.” Parent Quote - K.C.

“I enjoyed watching the boys want to read. Instead of it being a chore the children always ask if it is “free choice” reading. We now have books to interest every child. It gives me great pleasure to see boys want to read! Through our own school based professional development initiatives and this project, I believe the staff, students and community recognize the value we place on reading.” Teacher Quote - R.R.

One of our main challenges was the fact that we are a very small school. We only have ten full time staff and two half time teachers. We try hard to provide the children with many sports, folk dancing, and clubs. We are also a “Toronto Schools On The Move” school. This meant that most teachers were involved in other extra curricular activities coupled with trying to meet the goals set out for this project.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

The area for continued focus within our school is to provide a balanced literacy program with “Read Alouds”, shared reading, and to provide books for independent reading which appeal to boys and girls. We will continue to meet regularly for professional development and to share our best practices. More specifically, in the last few years, our focus has been on developing greater consistency of practice as it relates to independent reading, questioning, reading comprehension, higher order thinking, and assessment. Our growth as a staff has begun to assist us in branching out to explore writing as our next school based initiative.

Parent/Guardian Quote:

“My son was fortunate to benefit from the Boys’ Literacy Program. There were a variety of books and magazines that were of interest to boys available in the library and classrooms. Some of this material was used in a Boys’ Book Club. My son was able to attend various assemblies with special guests ranging from news personalities to authors and illustrators. Furthermore, he was able to attend a Boys’ Literacy Conference where the keynote speaker was R.L. Stine. My son was thrilled to get his autograph!” K.C.
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?

DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

**Qualitative Data**
1. Boys’ Survey Results 2006-2007
3. Teacher Surveys 2008

**Quantitative Data**
1. Grade 3 EQAO Data - 2003-2007
2. Grade 6 EQAO Data - 2003-2007
3. Comparison of the same male students’ EQAO results in Grade 3 and Grade 6
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Summary of Findings

Overall, the data shows that:
- the boys’ achievement levels showed significant improvement over time
- boys’ attitudes towards reading declined
- boys did not see themselves as good readers nor did they enjoy reading
- teachers felt that they had greater resources to support student engagement in reading and tailored their program to be more inclusive of student interests
- there was no significant change in the reading habits or engagement of male role models reading with their children in the home setting

“We were not able to link boys’ attitudes with their performance positively; however, this project was able to provide the school with the resources to support best practices in literacy and to highlight the value the school places on reading. This coupled with our focus on a balanced approach to literacy and our school based professional development gave the educators in our school the knowledge, tools, and resources to be able to deliver a stronger literacy program and, ultimately, to improve student achievement.”

Principal Quote

Quantitative Data

1. Grade 3 Data Over Time 2003-2007
The results for grade 3 male students performing at or above the Provincial Standard (Levels 3 and 4) showed a consistent improvement, with a deviation in scores in 2004-2005.

2. Grade 6 EQAO Data Over Time 2003-2007
The results for grade 6 male students demonstrate a dramatic improvement. The percentage of male students at or above the provincial standard rose steadily from 2003/2004 until 2006/2007 – 67% to 70% to 80% to 85%.

3. Comparison of the Same Male Students’ EQAO Results in Grade 3 and Grade 6
52% of the grade 3 male students in 2003-2004 achieved a level 3 or 4 in reading. When the same male students reached grade 6, 85% achieved levels 3 and 4.

Qualitative Data:

1. Boys’ Survey Results 2006-2007
Boys’ attitudes about reading and their interest in reading were inconclusive. There were no significant improvements in their opinions about reading or their reading habits.

2. Boys’ Attitudes – EQAO Results
Our EQAO results did not show an improvement in boys’ attitudes. In fact, there was a significant decrease in boys’ attitudes about reading and in viewing themselves as good readers.

3. Teacher Surveys
The teacher survey clearly demonstrates the teachers felt that our new resources in our Literacy Room, library, and classroom libraries, our commitment to boys’ literacy through class discussions, the use of more graphic organizers, Boys’ Book Clubs, and inviting families and the community to participate in their children’s learning had a positive effect on our male students.

There were no significant changes in attitudes or behaviors of male role models with respect to their participation in reading with their children or their personal reading habits.
The following quote nicely sums up our findings.

http://www.galtglobalreview.com/education/literacy_boys1.html  “The result… boys and girls learn differently. Boys often prefer action-centered stories, fantasy, and comic books, yet teachers and parents often do not acknowledge these as legitimate, or literary, forms of reading material. If boys' choices in reading are devalued in this way, then perhaps boys give up on reading because they feel ashamed of their preferences.”
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

The Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project had a great impact on us as educators. “How can I help my boys?”, is a question every good teacher asks himself/herself. As a staff, we became aware that boys have different needs. We took the time to survey our classes to find out what the boys wanted to read and we provided them with their requests. We now invite parents to participate in our programs not just at home, but actively at school. We are all using graphic organizers and are allowing the children to read books, magazines, and comics. We allow the boys more opportunities for oral discussion and every teacher on staff is using the same consistency of ‘best practice’. We have all become more aware of ways to reach all of our students.

The boys' literacy initiative and our school based professional development/professional learning community have been a very rewarding experience. We have become aware of what will be of interest to our boys and we often select books for “Read Alouds” and guided reading that we know will appeal to all of the children. Our boys enjoy learning to read from a variety of genres so much more and I am seeing a great improvement in attention and willingness to pick up a book.

“The boys’ literacy initiative taught me a lot about boys and literacy. My involvement in this initiative helped me understand what types of text motivate boys to read. As a librarian, it really opened my eyes and broadened my view about this topic. Purchasing books for the library has changed because of my experience in this initiative. I am now more inclusive in my book buying because I have a better understanding about what types of books speak to boys. When I book buy, I make certain that my purchases include books such as poetry, non-fiction texts, magazines, jokes and riddles, and the list continues. I have learned that the issue is not that boys do not like to read. The matter rests on what types of resources are available to them and whether or not these resources were chosen with boys in mind.” N.S.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
We conducted surveys to determine the boys’ favourite books. The primary students chose “I Spy” type books; joke books; funny, interactive books like Robert Munsch; science books about dinosaurs and animals; and the BoldPrint books. The junior students picked humour, sports, science, and horror.


Team Member Quote:
“The boys’ literacy initiative at our school created a school culture in which the boys became enthusiastic readers. As the school Librarian, I saw this enthusiasm in the library where many of the boys' special book bags are available. Boys became engaged with reading collections that were rich in materials that reflected boys’ interests, and engaged the boys with reading through inclusion of personal interests. It truly was a wonderful experience.” N.S.

Administrator Quote:
“The boys’ literacy initiative helped us to focus on the unique needs of all of our learners, purchase resources from a variety of genres and utilize the parents as partners in supporting our literacy initiative. The findings tell me that, more than student attitude and interest, focused school based professional development is integral to developing best practices and to improving student achievement. This project enhanced our ability to provide the necessary resources and the ‘extras’ to highlight our focus on literacy and student achievement.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes:
male role models, parent and community involvement, boys’ interests, school based professional development, resources that appeal to boys
Final School Report: 2008

Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project

DISTRICT:
Peel District School Board

SCHOOL(s) and GRADE(s):
Worthington Public School — Grades K-5

Teacher Inquiry Team Members:
Kim North — Principal
Marcia Moorcroft and John Horvath — Vice Principals
Carrol Hutchinson — Resource Teacher

Year 1: Spring/Fall 2006
Barbara Elvidge, Don Campbell, Christina Brulotte, Anthony Galioto, Sumitra Lad — Grade 2 Teachers
Maxine Richards, Joan Duncan-McLeish, Eile Short, Sandra Woodworth — Grade 5 Teachers

Year 2: 2007 Winter/Spring
Christina Brulotte, Leah De Cunha, Barbara Elvidge, Holly Darling, Maxine Richards, Ondine Servinis, Renee Scott, Kristin — MacOdrum — Grade 2 Teachers
Don Campbell — Teacher Librarian
Suzanne George, Michele Hume, Derek Lambert, Jennifer Lording, Karen Simpson-Parkes — Grade 3 Teachers
Joan Duncan-McLeish, Eile Short, Monika Verma, Sandra Woodworth, Lisa O’Blenis — Grade 5 Teachers

Year 3: Fall 2007/Spring 2008
Ann Daciw, Holly Darling, Wendy Doucette, Michele Hume, Jackie Irwin, Nirmala Prasad, Caroline Stewart, Karen Wanless — Kindergarten Teachers
Jeremy Crawford, Elaine Nadeau, Monika Verma, Anne Richardson, Kimberley Spence, Amy Tevelthuis — Grade 1 Teachers
Christina Brulotte, Leah DeCunha, Barbara Elvidge, Maxine Richards, Renee Scott — Grade 2 Teachers
Margaret Robertson, Suzanne George, Mike Featherston, Sadia Khan, Derek Lambert, Jennifer Lording, Karen Simpson-Parkes, — Grade 3 Teachers
Don Campbell — Teacher Librarian
Amy Bloxam, Leslie Dobbie, Geeta Joshi, Lisa MacArthur — Grade 4 Teachers
Tara Burroughs, Take Lachman, Joan Duncan-McLeish, Eile Short, Sandra Woodworth — Grade 5 Teachers
**Essential Question:** Will boys' attitudes and achievement in literacy (reading, writing, and oral) change as a result of using innovative instructional practices (such as games and drama) and using a wide variety of reading materials?

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

The following are the most important findings to improve boys' literacy emerging from our inquiry:

- Boys perceive reading in school as "in their classroom" – they do not see the library as "school reading".
- We need to pay attention to what boys are reading and listen to interactions to discover individual interests and needs.
- We need to regularly use peer observation and assessment.
- We need to use a variety of graphics and artifacts to engage boys and to confirm meaning.
- Boys like to talk about what they read and are likely influenced by peers with respect to what they read.
- Boys are engaged and have fun during hands-on activities such as drama and games, which reinforce literacy skills.
- Novelty seems to influence boys' engagement in literacy activities.
- Boys, in particular, like to reread familiar books and also read what the teacher is currently reading aloud.
- Boys like non-fiction, graphic novels, magazines, violence/adventure, strong visuals, and novelty (e.g., forward/backward, pop-up, pull-out, and "choose your own" endings). Boys like to read books made from television series or from movies.
- Boys will write the next story in a series if they are waiting for the new one to be published.
- Boys like series (e.g., graphic novels such as the *Bone* series and junior novels such as the *Magic Tree House* series).
- Boys will play very active games such as tag using the characters from the books they are reading (e.g., Batman tag).

**HOW DID OUR INQUIRY PROJECT IMPACT OUR INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES?**

We will:

- continue more use of peer assessment;
- do more teacher moderation on observation of reading behaviours;
- do more moderation of teacher questions and feedback about boys' literacy behaviours;
- encourage boys to talk with each other while they are reading;
- reduce the amount of writing required in responses to what boys are reading;
- offer more choice of reading responses (e.g., drama-tableaux, role play, skits, character games, art, drawing, discussion);
- give boys more choice in reading materials;
- give boys more freedom in how and where they read;
- broaden our definition of reading;
- need to know about and respect different intelligences and learning styles or preferences;
- encourage and open doors of opportunity for boys to publish written work so they see a purpose for their writing;
- practice daily guided reading across the grades;
- give specific feedback on reading behaviours for ongoing formative assessment; and
- expect student responses to reading through dialogue, questioning, and interaction.

**Student Quote:**

"I choose books to read that other people have recommended. Sometimes because they say it's really great, you should read it and I say, "What is it about?" They say, "I won't tell the rest, you'll have to find out." I like reading the same author; he makes the book funny every time he makes some new ones."

"Books that I read at school (meaning in the classroom) are like medieval times, they are long and boring; but I like the pictures – there are more exciting books in the library."

-- Grade 4 boys during group interview

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This project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
**WHAT IS OUR STORY?**

At Worthington, our original focus was on family involvement in making and playing games to promote boys' interest in literacy activities. We held monthly Family Reading Nights and held an Open House titled "Games Around the World" in which only a few families contributed games, though many attended. We wanted to reach out and build parent participation in literacy activities and thus influence boys' attitudes toward literacy activities. However, we had to change our original plan because our school community is a newer suburb with a broad mix of cultures and parents who have varying levels of income and education. Many parents work at two jobs and many live in extended families.

In many homes, the adults and children live very separate lives. The parents, grandparents, uncles, and aunts may be conversing in their home language or doing household work. Their children are often not included in these conversations, nor are they expected to do household tasks. The children spend a lot of time watching television, playing video games, or playing with siblings or cousins inside the home. In other homes, children may have a lot of household responsibility, but parents are not available to play or to read with them because they are working. When these parents are home, they don't perceive literacy activities or playing as part of their role. There is also a gap in how parents in many other cultures understand how to help their children with school work because their own educational experiences were different.

These were crucial realizations for our teaching team at Worthington.

We re-focused our original essential question from the community to our instructional practices. We used information from the current research on boys' literacy to integrate more innovative and proven strategies in our classrooms. These strategies included engaging learners through cooperative learning; designing, making, and playing games; and hands-on activities. We also had a renewed interest in guided reading and integrating language arts across the content areas. We continued to use grade-team planning for integrated units and three-part lessons that always had an oral base and always considered visual, auditory, and kinesthetic aspects for balance and engagement.

We observed and talked about what boys read and how they read. We noticed that, with more choice in reading materials, they were more excited about reading. We also noticed that boys like to talk about what they are reading and usually preferred highly graphic and factual material. For six years, we have been using backward design and the prompt/assessment/teaching cycle. We have a strong teaching staff that is open to learning and evolving as we dialogue together. The boys' literacy project has been wonderful for everyone. We have seen the difference that occurs in boys' engagement with innovative teaching, high-yield strategies, and a wide variety of reading materials in every classroom.

**WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?**

We will: (1) build a stronger connection to community through literacy activities; (2) work on a common assessment and make connections — extending thinking and inferencing in reading; (3) develop high yield strategies to promote vocabulary in games and interactive settings; (4) focus on a cross-school reading response strategy such as APE (Answer, Prove from Text, Extend); (5) continue discussion and professional development on guided reading in a literacy block; (6) expect daily practice with guided reading and the continuum of the gradual release of responsibility in literacy learning; (7) continue to use collaborative teams for common instructional practices, assessments, and setting of SMART goals; (8) build a school protocol for publishing best writing by using the central publishing centre in the library; (9) focus on high-yield instructional strategies to find ways to engage boys in literacy learning; (10) promote boys' engagement in reading and writing by implementing the writing process in the classrooms; (11) use the results of our six-week teaching and learning cycles to direct teacher dialogue about boys' literacy achievement; (12) promote more inquiry into boys' and literacy; (13) develop a cross-grade K-5 curriculum map on making connections — extending thinking and inferencing through a series of common questions; and (14) sustain our current positive teaching and learning climate.

**Parent/Guardian Quote:**

“I am a firm believer that, if parents create an environment where there is ongoing interactive language, children will want to read and be successful in school. In our family, literacy is always present through talking, games, outdoor walks, labeling what we see around us, and reading a wide variety of books and other print material. My husband and I have always read to our kids, taken them outside, and talked about what they see in the neighborhood.”

— Mother of a Grade 5 Boy and Grade 3 Girl
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT OUR FINDINGS?
DATA GATHERING and MAKING SENSE OF OUR DATA:

We decided to focus on a specific population of boys. For Year 1, we collected data on grade 2 students; for Year 2, grade 3 students; and for Year 3, grade 4 students. In this way, we were able to follow a specific group of students through the three years of the project (allowing for student transience and extended vacations).

**Quantitative Data: EQAO Results**
Grade 3 EQAO results for 2007 — these students are now our grade 4 students

**Quantitative Data: Report Card Marks**
Report card marks for English overall, Reading, Writing, and Oral and Visual Communication for Term 3 for grades 2 and 3 (2006 and 2007) and for Term 2 for grade 4 (some of the same students over a three-year period).

We used moderated marking and the teaching and learning cycle as part of our school culture. Since we are fairly consistent in our marking, we feel that the report card data is both reliable and valid. Each grade level team did common assessments with moderated marking, which created our data.

**Qualitative Data: Parent Questionnaire**
Parent questionnaire about playing and reading with their children at home. We administered this survey to parents of grade 3 students who were attending an interactive, hands-on informational EQAO presentation. We had approximately 50 parents attend, which is a small number compared with the total number of grade 3 students, and just 10 parents responded to the survey.

Based on the low attendance for the EQAO night, family literacy event nights, and the game nights as well as the low response to the survey, we took a second look at our essential question and decided instead to focus on our literacy work at school as it related to choice and literacy strategies.

For our next steps in fall 2008, we will be doing an outreach into the community to provide more information about how parents can work with their children — through a motivational speaker, David Bouchard, — and perhaps consider adult literacy classes.

**Qualitative Data: Teacher Focused Discussion**
Through cross-grade and teacher-focused discussion about boys' literacy, brainstorming, and e-mails in response to boys' literacy final report components, our insights, realizations, and reflections were the pivotal points for making changes in our programming and instruction for the present as well as for the future.

**Qualitative Data: Peer Observation Assessment of Reading Behaviors**
Peer observation assessment of reading behaviours was done by grade 4 boys and girls in 2008. This was the first time these students had done a peer assessment of reading behaviors. It was a very interesting task, since the questions revealed lots of information about student reading behaviors. The task was a challenging one. If a student observed someone who was a fluent reader but who moved a lot and talked a lot, the observer needed to really pay attention and their reflection was usually positive. For those students who observed readers who were struggling and took longer, or who did things that the observer found "different", the observer's reflections took on a more negative note. The lack of response for the "How did you feel?" reflection question could be because students were running out of time or energy to complete the question.

**Qualitative Data: Conversation on Boys' Reading Choices**
We did focused conversations with boys in grade 4 (who were in the study since grade 2) about their reading choices.

**Qualitative Data: Student Reading Interest and Attitude Survey**
We administered a survey for each of three years to a cohort of students who began in grade 2.
FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

EQAO Grade 3 2007 Results
Reading — 49% of boys at Levels 3 and 4
Writing — 45% of boys at Levels 3 and 4

We will be interested to see the results of the Grade 6 EQAO test for these boys.

Report Card Results

Boys' Achievement Over Three Years: End of Year Results (except 2008 which was Term 2)

Writing Marks

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<td>2008</td>
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Level 1: 3.6 to 2.0 to 0.0
Level 2: 30.9 to 20.4 to 29.1
Level 3: 65.5 to 67.5 to 66.7
Level 4: 0.0 to 10.2 to 4.2

Oral and Visual Communication Marks

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Level 1: decreased from 3.6 to 2.0 to 0.0
Level 2: 38.2 to 34.7 to 40.8
Level 3: 50.9 to 59.2 to 51.0
Level 4: 1.8 to 2.0 to 6.1

Reading Marks

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Level 1: decreased from 9.1 to 4.1 to 2.1
Level 2: 38.2 to 34.7 to 40.8
Level 3: 50.9 to 59.2 to 51.0
Level 4: 1.8 to 2.0 to 6.1
**FINDINGS: WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW? (cont.)**

For each term for 2007-08, the grade 4 teachers' summary indicated that boys made overall continued progress with respect to each prompt that assessed a different reading comprehension skill. The percentage of students at Level 1 decreased from 3.6% to 0.0%. The percentage of students at Levels 3 and 4 increased from 67.3% in grade 2 to 71.4% in grade 3, and then decreased to 64.7% in grade 4.

We have focused on guided reading this year during OFIP training across all grade levels. However, there are a number of transient students as well as a number of students who leave on extended vacations. In addition, we are not sure if there is consistent use of similar types of instructional strategies and assessments among grade levels. Given that the recommended peer assessment we tried with grade 4 students had some success, we are wondering if this procedure could be used for all grades. Since boys prefer to talk when reading and writing and it is a strength, we are wondering why we are seeing a decrease in Oral and Communication marks. Are we leveraging boys’ oral strengths through our planning, instruction and assessment?

Considering the "grade 4 slump", Jim Cummins' theory is that content vocabulary could have a major influence on ELL’s performance. We plan to dialogue about this with grades 4 and 5 teachers next fall and develop vocabulary high yield strategies to promote content vocabulary in games and interactive settings. We will also focus on a cross-school reading response strategy such as APE (Answer, Prove from text, Extend).

**Parent Questionnaire Results**
A small group of 10 parents responded positively about playing and reading with their children.

**Teacher Focused Discussion Results**
We found that our own attitudes improved when students had more choice, more oral interaction, and more active classroom programs. The increase in the students' success and engagement with books of their own choice will influence our future decisions. These discoveries led to a change in our essential question.

**Student Reading Interests and Attitudes**
We focused on the boys' perceptions of school in a written survey compared with perceptions in a conversation conducted in the library. One question in the Reading Attitude Survey was, "I only read to do school work." When this current grade 4 population of boys was given the survey in grade 2, Levels 3 and 4 = 53%. When this current grade 4 population of boys was given the survey in grade 4, Levels 3 and 4 = 82%. And yet, when a group of these boys was asked the same question in a focused conversation, they vehemently stated they did not only read to do school work. They stated that school work happened only in the classroom and that the school library was not part of school reading. We can assume that these students' perceptions were influenced when they took the written questionnaire in their classroom as opposed to the same question in the library with a resource teacher they did not know.

A second question was, "I think non-fiction is easier to read than fiction." The data was very similar for three years and supported boys' preference for non-fiction.

A third question was, "I like to read more books by the same author." Results for grade 2 boys were 60% for Levels 3 and 4; for grade 3 boys, 47%; and for grade 4 boys, 51%. Our teacher librarian believes that this is the grade 3 reading slump when boys are moving to chapter books from picture books. Boys seem to struggle with easy chapter books initially then, in grade 4 when they are more fluent readers, they choose more chapter books by the same author. It could also be a perception by the boys that they are not yet good readers. We can assume that by grades 3 and 4, boys are more willing to take a risk and try a new author or they have a wider variety of reading materials in their repertoire from which to choose.

A fourth question was, "I choose books to read that my friends have recommended." Results for grade 2 boys were 70%; for grade 3 boys, 51%; for beginning of grade 4 boys, 91%; and for the end of grade 4 boys, 51%. We can assume first that friends' opinions were very important to the majority of boys each year. At the beginning of grade 4 however, boys were very concerned about their friends' reading choices. We wonder if this was simply a case of feeling less confident at the beginning of the year due to a lack of reading over the summer.

The next steps for our inquiry question will be on whether boys' perceptions of reading are influenced by the environment?
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INQUIRY PROJECT ON US AS EDUCATORS?

Highlights of Teachers’ Focused Conversation on the Results of Playing Games and Improvement in Boys’ Literacy Skills

- We found that our own attitudes improved when students had more choice, more oral interaction, and more active classroom programs. The increase in the students’ success and engagement with books of their own choice will influence our future decisions. These discoveries led to a change in our essential question to: “Will boys’ attitudes and achievement in literacy (reading, writing, and oral) change as a result of using innovative instructional practices such as games and drama and using a wide variety of reading materials?”

Highlights of Teachers’ E-mail Responses to Boys’ Literacy Final Report Questions

- When the pictures were stimulating and the text wasn’t just about relationships, all of the children enjoyed the book, but boys were truly engaged and interested.
- Some boys enjoy fiction when it is read to them, but may not enjoy reading it themselves.
- The Publishing Centre in the library motivated boys to read non-fiction or graphic novels and they were eager to read their published books aloud.
- Boys like to talk before, during, and after reading and writing activities. They often get more excited than girls when allowed to talk about the books they are reading.
- Boys love to read from a variety of books.
- Boys enjoy exploring familiar books and re-visiting favorite authors and often read the same stories over and over again. Whether it is a sense of comfort, a kinship with a character, or just a love for the book, boys will reread books.
- We have a new appreciation for the types of texts boys prefer and which engage them.
- Our own learning styles and reading practices are sometimes quite different from boys’ learning styles and reading preferences – we now recognize the importance of student-centered programming.
- Multiple Intelligences and students’ strengths should be the lens through which we teach and assess performances.
- We are always looking for ways to make better connections with our community to better our school environment.
- The factors that influence our children’s education aren’t limited to what happens to them in class, but also includes what they bring with them to class.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE RECOMMEND?

For Boys:
Fiction: Spiderwick Chronicles; Roald Dahl books; Geronimo Stilton books; Bionicle; Asterix comics; Magic Tree House books; Anime; Manga; Bone graphic novels; adventure; mystery; Beverly Cleary novels; games; Harry Potter
Factual: highly graphic: history, nature, adventure, mystery; You Wouldn’t Survive series, Eyewitness books, guides to card games; Pokemon, and books that are strategic guides to games such as chess and magic tricks

For professional development: Even Hockey Players Read by David Booth; First Steps; Ontario Ministry Guides to Literacy; Boy Writers by Ralph Fletcher; Critical Literacy by McLaughlin and DeVoogd; Beyond Monet by Bennett and Rolheiser; Text Structure by Diane Dillabough; and The No-Nonsense Guide to Teaching Writing by Davis and Hill

Team Member Quote:
“Since we have been involved with this project, my thinking has done a 180 degree turn. I now allow boys to read what they like to read — non-fiction, graphic novels, report type books, informational texts, etc. I also allow them opportunities to share with a partner when they read. Boys really love to read like this — it is difficult for them to read quietly, without sharing. These allowances have made reading much more enjoyable for everyone in my class and easier to manage. It has made me much more aware of the fact that girls are not necessarily stronger or better readers, or that they like reading more. Boys and girls often, but not always, approach reading differently and we absolutely have to make allowances for this in school.”

Administrators’ Quote:
“We have found this Boys’ Literacy Project very enlightening on several fronts. Teachers are listening to boys with a broader focus and offering a greater variety of reading materials and more choices for responding to reading. Within the Worthington learning community, parents and teachers are continuing to dialogue and broaden conversations about reading, boys and reading, and how to work with students on literacy activities in the home. Our administration team observes and participates with increasing enthusiasm as the teaching staff engages in what works best with boys and literacy.”

List five (5) key words unique to your project for search engine purposes: