

An Inclusive Approach to Character Development

About the project ...

The purpose of Avon Maitland District School Board's character development project was to embed the teaching and learning of key attributes of character development, environmental education, equity and diversity and Aboriginal education initiatives into professional learning communities (PLCs). The PLCs were facilitated by learning coordinators and literacy/numeracy resource teachers. Approximately 500 elementary teachers from primary, junior and intermediate divisions and their administrators participated in three professional learning communities and one teaching-learning pathway each term. During each pathway, attributes that reflect the connectedness of the initiatives were embedded in lessons to help students gain a clear understanding of what the attributes 'look like, sound like and feel like' in daily interactions in their schools and communities. The initial focus was on respect, one of the board's ten identified character attributes. Students were engaged in ongoing learning activities and tasks that were developed and supported during each pathway.

Impact on student learning and school culture ...

- Through the PLCs, teachers learned how to arrive at a common understanding of abstract concepts such as respect. They also learned specific strategies to convey these concepts to students.
- Through the creation of concept charts at PLC meetings, teachers became skilled at expressing abstract concepts in various ways to support and enhance students' understanding of the concepts. The charts were then used as resources to support daily classroom learning activities and provide a framework for extended student learning.

Lessons learned for moving forward ...

- It is important to make connections between initiatives and embed them together in professional learning experiences. The PLC participants initially believed that they were focusing solely on specific character attributes and initiatives, but once they began deconstructing mentor texts, they realized that an attribute such as respect has obvious connections to many initiatives such as environmental education, inclusive education and the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Policy Framework.
- Classroom teachers must have access to resources that focus on the character attributes. By providing a list of titles that focus on character attributes, teachers were able to integrate them seamlessly into the PLC activities and tasks and make them a regular part of their instructional practice.
- The success of the PLC learning led to a next-step plan to focus on the character attribute of responsibility in a similar manner.

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