

2007
ONTARIO EDUCATION
RESEARCH
SYMPOSIUM

SUMMARY REPORT
2007

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

Building on the success of the first Ontario Education Research Symposium, held in January 2006, representatives from Ontario's education research community once again gathered a year later to further advance a provincial research agenda. More than 180 participants took part in the 2007 Ontario Education Research Symposium, held in Toronto January 18-20.

Participants in the 2007 Symposium included university faculties of education (Vice-Presidents of Research, Deans, faculty and graduate students), school boards, senior provincial policy and program managers and advisors, independent education researchers, research funding organizations, as well as both provincial and national organizations with interests in the intersection of education, research and public policy.

The two-day Symposium focused on education research as a means to improve learning and teaching, with a special focus on *closing the gap*. "*Closing the gap*" can mean many things. In this context, it was about success for *all* students. The 2007 Ontario Education Research Symposium examined identifiable sub-populations of students known to be all too often behind their peers. These subpopulations included students with special education needs, students having difficulty making the challenging transition from elementary to high school, students involved in discipline problems, and aboriginal students in a cultural setting more often than not remote from their own. Researchers were challenged to report what the research says works to help these subpopulations succeed, what the implications of those findings are for practice in publicly supported schools and on what questions of consequence researchers should be putting their attention. Having looked at particular subpopulations, the symposium examined instruction in an area that is pivotal to equipping all students for their continued studies: teaching reading comprehension. Finally, the "support system" was looked at, with parents' engagement front and centre. Recognizing the importance of parental engagement, consideration was given to the roles of principals and parent councils and the particular situation of students in French-language schools.

In addition to hearing presentations from experts in these key topic areas, the symposium participants met in four separate working sessions, to identify and further develop ideas about applications and next steps based on the research presented in the plenary sessions, and to specify and elaborate on the important research questions arising from each topic area.

This year's Symposium was opened by Ben Levin, Ontario's Deputy Minister of Education. Dr. Levin pointed to the potential for research to take on greater importance in the education system, and noted that there had been some good progress – within the Ministry, school boards and faculties of education – since last year's symposium.

Dr. Levin outlined some of the key steps taken since the first Education Research Symposium, including:

- The appointment of Dr. Carol Campbell as the ministry's first Chief Research Officer, providing central leadership and focus for research and evaluation across the ministry aligned with the ministry's strategic directions; and
- Establishing the Ontario Education Research Panel (OERP), to promote research and evaluation activities that will contribute to the attainment of Ontario's education goals. The 13-member OERP was selected through an extensive nomination and review process, with the appointments based on each individual's knowledge, skills, and experience rather than their affiliation to any particular organization.

In setting out goals for both the 2007 Symposium and follow-up activities, Dr. Levin noted the importance of research infrastructure (systems and practices), building capacity and skill sets, communication, innovation and partnerships.

THE ONTARIO EDUCATION RESEARCH PANEL

All 13 members of the OERP, led by co-chairs Doris McWhorter and Mario Lajoie, attended the 2007 Symposium, participating in a dialogue breakfast with Symposium delegates, and attending all the breakout workshops to hear the discussions and conclusions first-hand.

OERP Members:

Kathleen Bloom
Serge Demers
Paul Favaro
Joan Green
Yves Herry
Carl James
Mario Lajoie

Patricia McAdie
Doris McWhorter
Joanne Robinson
Sandra Sangster
Dennis Thiessen
Charles Ungerleider

THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION RESEARCH STRATEGY

The Ministry of Education research strategy was presented at the Symposium by Dr. Carol Campbell, the Chief Research Officer for the Ministry of Education. Her presentation appears in this report. The Strategy attempts to create greater capacity to use, conduct, apply and share research and evaluation in the service of advancing Ontario's education goals. It has activities aimed at creating this capacity internal to the ministry and within the broader, external community of education partners. The formation of the Ontario Education Research Panel (OERP) is an important way in which the Ministry is attempting to build stronger relationships among the diverse parties involved in research and evaluation activities and their application. As well, in the future the ministry and the OERP will produce the annual research symposium in partnership.

SYMPOSIUM AGENDA

Following is an abbreviated agenda from the 2007 Ontario Education Research Symposium, outlining the various presentations, plenary sessions and breakout workshops throughout the conference.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 19

WELCOME / INTRODUCTION

Richard Franz, Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, Ministry of Education

OPENING REMARKS

Ben Levin, Deputy Minister of Education

INTRODUCTION – ONTARIO EDUCATION RESEARCH PANEL

Doris McWhorter and Mario Lajoie, Co-Chairs, Ontario Education Research Panel

SESSION I

Success for All Students: What works to support student learning and what questions do we need to focus on to increase it?

Moderator: George Zegarac, Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Planning and Elementary/Secondary Programs Division

Moderated panel presentations and discussion.. Topics / Panelists:

- **Supporting Aboriginal Student Success: Self-Esteem and Identity, A Living Teachings Approach**
Pamela Toulouse, Laurentian University
- **Narrowing Achievement Gaps for Children with Special Education Needs**
Marcia Barnes, University of Guelph
- **Helping Students Who Are Experiencing Persistent and/or Serious Discipline Problems to Succeed in School**
Shelley Hymel, University of British Columbia
- **Fresh Starts/False Starts: A Review of Literature on the Transition from Elementary to Secondary School**
Kate Tilleczeck, Laurentian University

WORKING SESSION 'A'

Breakout workshops, including table discussions and a report back to members of the Ontario Education Research Panel. Topics:

- **Supporting Aboriginal Students' Success**
- **Children with Special Education Needs**
- **Disciplinary Challenges**
- **Transitions from Elementary to Secondary School**

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

"Connecting Research, Policy and Practice: the Ontario Education Research Strategy"

Carol Campbell, Chief Research Officer

SESSION II

What Works: Developing Effective Reading Comprehension Skills

Moderator: Avis Glaze, Chief Student Achievement Officer and CEO, Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat

Moderated panel presentations and discussion.. Topics / Panelists:

- **What Have We Learned About Reading Comprehension?**
John Kirby, Queen's University
- **Word Study And Reading Comprehension: Implications For Instruction**
Ruth McQuirter Scott, Brock University

WORKING SESSION 'B'

Breakout workshops, including table discussions and a report back to members of the Ontario Education Research Panel. Topics:

- **Reading Comprehension**
- **Teaching Reading Comprehension**

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

“Research Impacts on Policy and Practice: What are the stakes? What is achievable?”
Stan Shapson, Vice-President, Research and Innovation, York University

SATURDAY, JANUARY 20

DIALOGUE WITH ONTARIO EDUCATION RESEARCH PANEL

SESSION III

Engaging Parents in Students' Success

Moderator: Dominic Giroux, Assistant Deputy Minister, French-Language Education and Educational Operations

Moderated panel presentations and discussion.. Topics / Panelists:

- **Parent Engagement: Creating a Shared World**
Debbie Pushor, University of Saskatchewan
- **School Leaders' Role in Supporting Parent Engagement**
Margaret Roberts, York Region District School Board
- **School Councils as a Vehicle for Enhancing Parent Engagement**
Gord Kerr, York Region District School Board Parent Engagement Advisory Committee; former school council chair
- **Considerations for the French-Language Education System**
Phyllis Dalley, University of Ottawa

WORKING SESSION 'C'

Breakout workshops, including table discussions and a report back to members of the Ontario Education Research Panel. Topics:

- **The Relationship Between Parent Engagement and Student Achievement**
- **School Leaders' Role**
- **School Councils**
- **French-Language Education**

WORKING SESSION 'D'

REGIONAL DISCUSSIONS

Breakout workshops assigned by geographical area, to discuss local/regional applications stemming from Symposium discussions.

SUMMARY OF APPLICATIONS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS ARISING

Doris McWhorter and Mario Lajoie, Co-Chairs, Ontario Education Research Panel

CLOSING REMARKS

Aryeh Gitterman, Assistant Deputy Minister, Instruction and Leadership Development Division

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Ontario Ministry of Education would like to thank the following organizations for supporting the 2007 Ontario Education Research Symposium.

- Association of Education Researchers of Ontario
- Council of Directors of Education
- Ontario Association of Deans of Faculties of Education
- Research Coordination Team – Ministry of Education

CONCLUSIONS FROM THE 2007 SYMPOSIUM

To close the 2007 Symposium, Doris McWhorter and Mario Lajoie, co-chairs of the Ontario Education Research Panel, provided a top-level summary of the proceedings. They noted a number of recurring themes throughout the discussions:

- The need to mobilize existing knowledge;
- Forging new partnerships and linkages;
- Informing classroom instruction;
- Closing the loop between research and practice; and
- Identifying key research questions and clarifying what qualifies as research.



In conclusion, the OERP co-chairs advised the participants that input from the Symposium will inform the work of the OERP, as well as the Ministry of Education, as Ontario's education research agenda moves forward in the coming year. They noted that the Symposium had provided very positive feedback on the OERP vision, with many suggestions for moving it to action.

As the OERP and Ministry of Education build from the 2007 Symposium, next steps include:

- Reviewing the ideas, insights and recommended actions stemming from the Symposium;
- Refining the OERP plan;
- Communication of research questions and priorities;
- Knowledge mobilization;
- Acting as a broker for collaboration and partnerships; and
- Preparing for the 2008 Ontario Education Research Symposium.

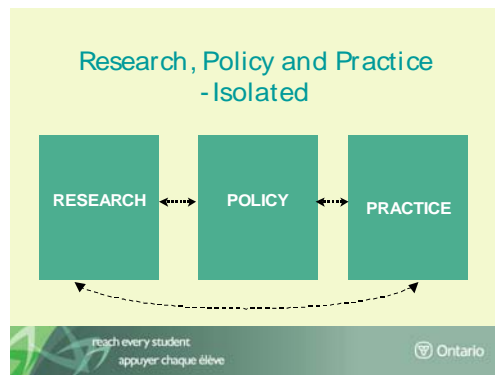
KEYNOTE PRESENTATION

Carol Campbell
Chief Research Officer
Ontario Ministry of Education

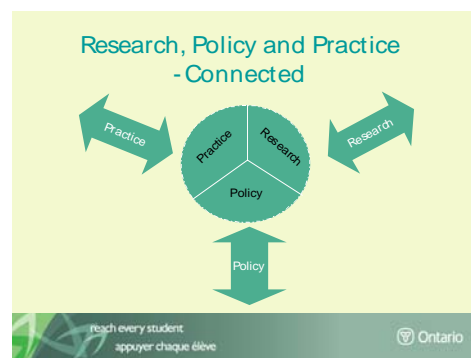


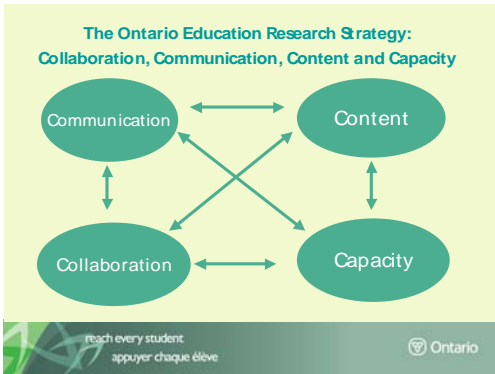
*“Connecting Research, Policy and Practice:
The Ontario Education Research Strategy”*

Following are slides from Carol Campbell’s keynote presentation.



- Connecting Research, Policy and Practice
- Growing literature indicates connections are desirable but difficult
 - Recognizing diverse contributions alongside common commitment
 - Shifting focus from identifying problems to demonstrating possibilities
- reach every student
appuyer chaque élève
- Ontario





- ## Collaboration
- Ontario Education Research Symposium
 - The Ontario Education Research Panel (OERP)
 - The Research Dissemination Partnership Planning Group
 - Managing Information for Student Achievement: Professional Network Centres
- reach every student
 appuyer chaque élève
- Ontario

- ## Communication
- Research Dissemination Activities
 - Research Dissemination Partnership Plan
 - What Works? Research into Practice
 - Unlocking Potential for Learning Series
 - Webcast: www.curriculum.org
 - Websites: www.edu.gov.on.ca
 - www.inspirelearning.org
 - Others?
- reach every student
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- Ontario

- ## Content
- Increased student **achievement**
 - Reduced gaps in outcomes – **equity**
 - Increased public **confidence**
- reach every student
 appuyer chaque élève
- Ontario

- ## Capacity
- Chief Research Officer
 - ADMs' Research Steering Group
 - Researcher-in-Residence
 - Ministry Research Co-ordination Team
 - Evaluation and Research Learning Program
- reach every student
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- Ontario

- ## Research Connections
- Building sustainable connections requires simultaneously building capacity
 - From 'research says' to transforming understanding and practice in complex contexts
- reach every student
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- ## Questions
- How are you connecting research and policy and/or practice?
 - What further actions can be taken forward?
 - How do we build and sustain Ontario's Education research strategy?
- reach every student
 appuyer chaque élève
- Ontario

DISCUSSION PAPERS

Seven Discussion Papers were prepared in advance of the 2007 Ontario Education Research Symposium, as a foundation for discourse during and after the Symposium.

Discussion Paper #1

Supporting Aboriginal Student Success: Self-Esteem and Identity, A Living Teachings Approach

Dr. Pamela Rose Toulouse
Laurentian University



Abstract

The connection between Aboriginal student success and self-esteem (identity) are explored and discussed in this article. The framework in which this paper is structured follows the seven good life teachings of the Ojibwe people. Each teaching has a companion principle which is the implication for educational practice. Each section is supported with research and offers strategies for student success. The question of ‘What works?’ is central to this discussion.

Supporting Aboriginal Student Success: Self-Esteem and Identity, A Living Teachings Approach

A growing body of research demonstrates that Aboriginal students’ self-esteem is a key factor in their school success (e.g., Hilberg & Tharp, 2002; Kanu, 2002; Swanson, 2003). An educational environment that honours the culture, language and worldview of the Aboriginal student is critical to this process. The curriculum and pedagogy of schools needs to meaningfully represent and include Aboriginal people’s contributions, innovations and inventions. Aboriginal students require schools in all aspects to honour ‘who they are’ and ‘where they have come from’ (e.g., Antone, 2003; Gamlin, 2003; van der Wey, 2001). Aboriginal self-esteem is described as the balanced and positive interconnection between the physical, emotional/mental, intellectual and spiritual realms (see Figure 1.0 – An Aboriginal Model of Self-Esteem).

Figure 1.0 – An Aboriginal Model of Self-Esteem

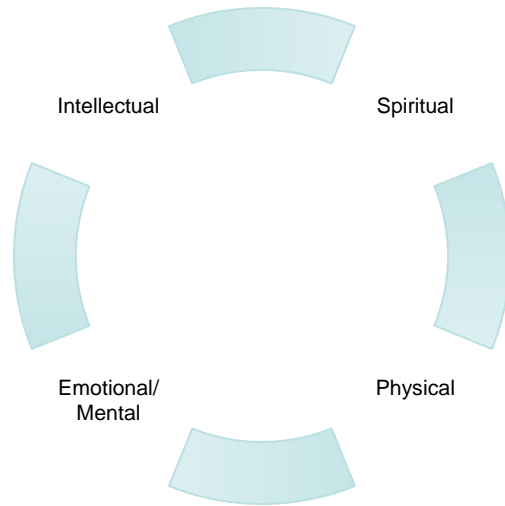


Figure 1.0 - These four aspects represent ‘self’ and these are interconnected. Balance in all these areas is imperative to an individuals’ sense of self.

Introduction

This article will explore the relationship between Aboriginal self-esteem and educational attainment, with particular emphasis on the practical meanings of these elements for the classroom. Some of the key questions that serve as a discussion sounding board are as follows:

1. What strategies currently work for Aboriginal students in schools? And, why is this so important to create meaningful change?
2. What are the day to day implications for educators? And, how can we ensure Aboriginal student needs are met?
3. What don’t we know about Aboriginal student success? And, how can future research directions reflect those unknown variables?

The discovery and pursuit of potential answers will occur through pre-existing research that explores these queries. It will meaningfully proceed through a cultural framework where the ‘living teachings’ of the Ojibwe People guide this paper (see Table 1.0 – Ojibwe Good Life Teachings and Implications for Education).

Table 1.0 - Ojibwe Good Life Teachings and Implications for Education

Teaching	Implications for Education
Respect	By having high expectations for the Aboriginal student through honouring their culture, language and worldview in our schools.
Love	By demonstrating our belief (as educators) that all Aboriginal students can and will succeed through our own commitment to their learning/teaching styles.
Bravery	By committing to change our school curriculum through including the contributions, innovations and inventions of Aboriginal people.
Wisdom	By sharing our best practices on Aboriginal Education with each other through on-going Professional Development and Research that focuses on imbuing equity.
Humility	By acknowledging that we have limited knowledge about the diversity of Aboriginal People and accessing Key First Nation Resources to enhance that state.
Honesty	By accepting that we have failed Aboriginal Students in the past and reviewing those factors to encourage change in the education system (increased parental/guardian involvement, schools, teacher education).
Truth	By evaluating the school success (with measurable outcomes) of Aboriginal students as a key indicator of 'how' inclusive our curriculum and pedagogy really is.

Note: The seven good life teachings are values/principles that are central to the Anishinabek (Ojibwe, Odawa, Pottawatomi) Peoples. The recommendations represent the implications for education that parallels each of these teachings.

Respect

By having high expectations for the Aboriginal student through honouring their culture, language and worldview in our schools.

This principle is central to the success of the Aboriginal student and has been reaffirmed through on-going research (e.g., Bell, 2004; Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat & Curriculum Services Canada, 2006). It is crucial that the Aboriginal student feel that they have a meaningful place in our schools. This can be achieved by ensuring that our own belief in the abilities of the Aboriginal student is great. Educators can either make or break the school experience of the Aboriginal student. This is why it is so important that the Aboriginal student see themselves (history, origins, culture) in the classroom. It is also key that these students know that their teachers care about them and have the highest regard for their learning. Respect (in Ojibwe terms) means to know that we are sacred and that we have a place in this world. This is 'how' we need to foster and support our Aboriginal students.

The implications for practice and 'what' this means for the classroom can be found in the following applications:

- Aboriginal cultures are celebrated throughout the school program.
- The library has a broad range of Aboriginal books and resources.
- Teachers are encouraged (and supported) to incorporate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples throughout the curriculum.
- The uniqueness of Aboriginal cultures are taught as a minimum baseline (500 Nations and their contributions) before the end of Grade 8.
- The Aboriginal territory on which the school is located is acknowledged at the door. This can be represented by having a welcoming in the Aboriginal language of that land.

These strategies are a beginning in showing respect for the Aboriginal peoples of the area. The Aboriginal student will feel that they are an integral part of the school. This ‘caring’ for their origins will be reinforced by the teacher’s belief that they can and will succeed.

Love

By demonstrating our belief (as educators) that all Aboriginal students can and will succeed through our own commitment to their learning/teaching styles.

This principle requires action by fostering and supporting the Aboriginal student in their learning environment. It requires a change and commitment to the pedagogical transformation of the classroom. The learning styles of the Aboriginal student are unique and their school success is dependent upon educators teaching differently. Hilberg and Tharp (2002) have identified that Aboriginal students lean towards a) a holistic style of education (learning from whole to part), b) the use of a variety of visual organizers (multitude of hands on manipulatives – agenda maps), c) a reflective mode of learning (have adequate time to complete tasks & answer questions) and d) a preference for collaborative tasks (group and pair work in safe classroom environments that ‘honour who they are’). These unique aspects of the Aboriginal student and their preferences for learning need to be present in their day to day activities. This is ‘how’ Aboriginal student success can be achieved.

The implications for classroom practice are visually represented below (see Figure 2.0 – Appreciating the Learning Styles of the Aboriginal Student). This figure is the demonstration of the teaching of Love (in Ojibwe terms), which is perceived as those acts that we selflessly perform for others in our world.

Figure 2.0 – Appreciating the Learning Styles of the Aboriginal Student

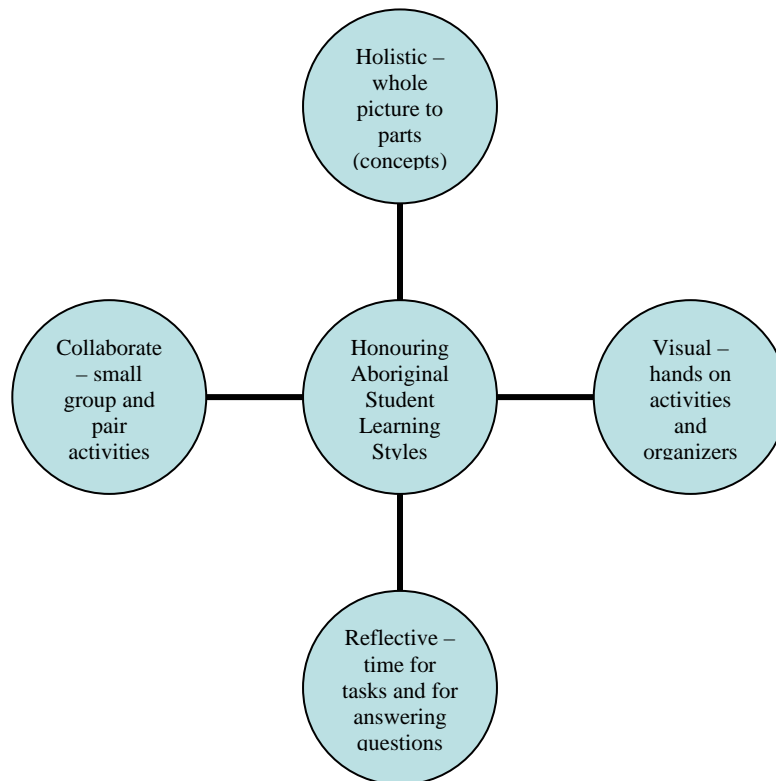


Figure 2.0 – These strategies are dependent upon a classroom environment that supports the culture, language and worldview of the Aboriginal student.

Bravery

By committing to change our school curriculum through including the contributions, innovations and inventions of Aboriginal people.

This principle supports the Aboriginal student by providing opportunities to highlight and celebrate their Nations. The Shki-Mawtch-Taw-Win-En-Mook (Path to New Beginnings) Curriculum Project in Northern Ontario is a living example of this value in action. This curriculum is a series of meaningful First Nation units (with resources) that meet the Ministry of Education expectations (grade/subject specific). It is a beautiful collection of lessons and activities (K to 12) that honour the contributions of Aboriginal People to the World. The partners, Kenjegin Teg Educational Institute, the Rainbow District School Board and the Ojibwe Cultural Foundation have launched this comprehensive curriculum project with great pride (see www.thenewpath.ca). These units all begin with the Aboriginal expectations of the area (Anishinabek) and are continually guided by local Elders and cultural resource people. The worldview of Aboriginal people is crucial to the success and authenticity of this project. By incorporating this ‘form/type of an education’ into schools we facilitate and reinforce a positive identity for Aboriginal students.¹

¹ This curriculum project has been piloted (and continues to be) in various schools within the Rainbow District School Board. Preliminary anecdotal comments from teachers, students and various parents suggest

The implications for classroom practice and the strategies to implement this principle take on the following key points:

- Drawing on key curriculum resources that are Aboriginal specific (and still meet the Ministry expectations) and utilizing them in the school.
- Creating partnerships and establishing relationships with Aboriginal communities and schools to learn from each other.
- Highlighting the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and ensuring that their innovations are honoured (example: Daily Facts).
- Bringing in various Aboriginal resource people to share their teachings, knowledge and language.

These approaches are bravery (as defined in Ojibwe terms) in the sense that this value requires change. Bravery means to face ourselves and others (people, places, institutions) with integrity. The self-esteem and success of the Aboriginal learner depends upon our ability to do so (e.g., Goulet, 2001; Kirkness, 1998).

Wisdom

By sharing our best practices on Aboriginal Education with each other through on-going Professional Development and Research that focuses on imbuing equity.

The good life teaching of wisdom reminds us that we are life long learners. It also reminds us of the value of sharing and engaging in dialogue with ‘what we know’. This principle reflects that spirit of wisdom and the need for disseminating ‘what works’ for Aboriginal students. This can be achieved through on-going research and various professional development opportunities (many modes of instruction). Swanson (2003) provides us with many of those insights into key strategies that motivate/support Aboriginal students. Her research suggests these practical applications for the classroom:

- Celebrate their individual achievements and cultural background.
- Engage the student at a physical, emotional/mental, intellectual and spiritual level.
- Use a variety of teaching methods (with a particular emphasis on holism, visual organizers, kinesthetic opportunities and reflection).
- Create an environment where humour and ‘group talk’ is accepted.

These four points are great examples of suggestions that aid in Aboriginal student success. These examples come directly from Swanson’s work in an Aboriginal community in Northern Ontario.

Best practices are crucial to the well being of the Aboriginal learner. Sharing these practices in formal and informal settings is key to our own growth as educators. Teachers need to be supported in research activities to reflect on their practice. Practitioner research, with adequate training in various forms of critical ethnography, can bring us great insight into ‘what needs to be changed’ for the Aboriginal learner.² This type of research offers the teaching/learning community a different view of the issue/s at hand. The key

the valuing of Native knowledge and worldview instilling pride amongst Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals alike.

² Critical ethnography is a research approach that has the researcher interrogate the system and institution in which s/he studies. This approach focuses questions on the structures from which the ‘researched’ operate. Critical ethnography problematizes structures/institutions (and their embedded epistemologies).

components of this section are summarized and presented below (see Table 2.0 – Strategies for Aboriginal Learner Student Success).

Table 2.0 – Strategies for Aboriginal Learner Student Success

Wisdom is Sharing
<u>Celebrate Student</u> : Achievements, Culture, Learning Styles
<u>Class Environment</u> : Holistic, Group Talk, Humour
<u>Teacher Research</u> : Critical Ethnography, Publish, Professional Development

Note: These strategies have been synthesized from this section called Wisdom. It is based upon the motivation research by Swanson (2003) and the learning styles research by Hilberg & Tharp (2002).

Humility

By acknowledging that we have limited knowledge about the diversity of Aboriginal People and accessing Key First Nation Resources to enhance that state.

The Ojibwe teaching of humility reminds us of our fragility of self and the need to reach out to others for assistance. This is a key tenet in our educational goal of ensuring that the Aboriginal learner has success in school. As educators we need to go beyond our realms and ask the ‘Aboriginal experts’ key questions. It is so important that we go to Aboriginal organizations, institutions and members of the communities for direction. This can be achieved by following these suggested strategies:

- Work with Aboriginal organizations to collect/purchase curriculum and resources for the benefit of all peoples (create an inventory).
- Conduct an inventory of Aboriginal curriculum and resources within mainstream federal, provincial and territorial organizations.
- Organize this curriculum and resources (books, videos, DVD, kits, software, other resources) into grade specific categories.
- Disseminate this information to all school boards and the teacher federations in hard copy and electronic copy.
- Create policy that advocates for Aboriginal inclusion and equity in schools.

The key is to always include Aboriginal peoples as meaningful participants in any processes regarding Aboriginal children. The education of Aboriginal students and their futures support and build capacity for their Nations.

Aboriginal resources and the use of specifically Aboriginal books in the classroom are key to learner success (e.g. Doige, 1999). Literature that reflects the realities and culture of Aboriginal students supports their sense of self. It also challenges non-Aboriginal students to think about their peers in different ways. The resources in the classroom that are Aboriginal specific must also be analyzed to ensure their relevancy. Aboriginal resources should detract from the perpetuation of stereotypes and freezing Aboriginals in time. The literature that is selected and utilized needs to undergo a screening process that parallels these issues. Doige (1999) in her research of the impact of Aboriginal children’s books on student teachers found that critical dialogue could be facilitated when this literature was introduced. Most non-Aboriginal student teachers in her course would leave with a greater understanding, sensitivity and genuine caring for Aboriginal peoples. The Aboriginal student teachers in the course were grateful that their cultures and worldview were being

honoured. Now, think of the impact that Aboriginal books and resources would have in our schools? What kind of an impact would it have on the self-esteem of the Aboriginal learner? The answer is clear and obvious in terms of positivity and acceptance.

Honesty

By accepting that we have failed Aboriginal Students in the past and reviewing those factors to encourage change in the education system (increased parental/guardian involvement, schools, teacher education).

In the 2004 Report from the Office of the Auditor General of Canada we are presented with an alarming picture of Aboriginal education:

- There is a 28 year educational gap between First Nations (on-reserve) and Canadians (para. 2).
- Equitable access to quality education programs of their own choice is limited and restricted (para. 3).
- Educational achievement of Aboriginal students (and the gap between their Canadian counterparts) has not changed significantly since the 2000 Report from the same office (para. 10).
- The school age population (elementary/secondary) is growing and is estimated at 40% (as opposed to 25% with Canadians). A strategy to close the educational gap is imminent and needs to happen with accountability to Aboriginals (para. 32 & para. 33).

Albeit this report reflects the current situation with Aboriginals living on-reserve it is also highly suggestive of the off-reserve population as well. It is clearly a crisis and the success of the Aboriginal learner is dependent upon real change.

Honesty (in Ojibwe terms) means to 'be and get real' with the situation at hand. It means to proceed in a manner where responsibility and change go hand in hand. This is the point that we as educators have come to in regards to Aboriginal education. The learners from these diverse communities deserve and have the right to access, respect and inclusion. How do we proceed? Who needs to be included? Where does this change take place? What other factors need to be considered here? Aboriginal parents/guardians need to be valued. Schools need to reflect the culture, worldview and language of Aboriginals. Teacher education programs need to do more to prioritize Aboriginal inclusion (equity). These are definite areas for continued exploration and research. These are crucial areas that support the success of the Aboriginal learner in all facets.

Truth

By evaluating the school success (with measurable outcomes) of Aboriginal students as a key indicator of 'how' inclusive our curriculum and pedagogy really is.

Truth (in Ojibwe terms) means to examine (with clarity) the reality and lived experiences of a situation. It is the process of coming to terms with 'how things really are' and developing a plan to change, accept or modify an aspect of life. The success of the Aboriginal learner needs to be measured and this requires clear outcomes. The success of the Aboriginal learner is not so much a measure of their own learning, but, clearly an indicator of 'how' educators and their respective systems are committed to equity. This process can only happen when appropriate policy and the structural support is put in place to do so. The Aboriginal Education Policy Framework (e.g. EDU, 2006) is a step in the right direction. It posits the Aboriginal learner and their needs front and centre (see Table 3.0 – Synthesis of Key Aspects of Aboriginal Education Policy Framework).

Table 3.0 – Synthesis of Key Aspects of Aboriginal Education Policy Framework

Principles	Key Words/Teachings/Values
Excellence in Education and Accountability	Quality, achievement, support, resources, specific needs of Aboriginal learner...
Equity and Respect for Diversity	Creates, nurtures, positive, identity, belonging, endorses learning about Aboriginal student's culture...
Inclusiveness, Collaboration and Shared Responsibility	Governments, institutions, families, communities, programs and services for Aboriginal learners...
Respect for Constitutional and Treaty Rights	Section 35 of Constitution Act, respects and protects the Aboriginal learner...

Note: The key words are taken from the Draft policy document and are intended to demonstrate the semantic (meanings) nature of the Framework Principles.

Conclusion

Self-esteem is the connection between the physical, emotional/mental, intellectual and spiritual realms. It is how an individual lives in balance (identity) with each of these aspects of self being cared for and attended to. The Aboriginal learner and their success is dependent upon educators and schools respecting this view. It requires change in 'how we proceed' and 'teach' our Aboriginal learners. It means that the pedagogy and content of curriculum in classes be inclusive of Aboriginal culture, language and worldview. This paper has been a journey that was guided by the seven good life teachings of the Ojibwe. Each teaching was accompanied by a principle that was the 'implication for education'. Research supported these viewpoints and the key question (What works for Aboriginal learners?) was explored and discussed. Where do we go from here? What happens next? How do we ensure that the Aboriginal student is honoured? Why is this critical to our accountability to these learners? These are questions that will require further discussion (research) and action.

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Discussion Paper #2

***Where There's A Will There Are Ways
to Close the Achievement Gap
for Children with Special Education Needs***

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Children who get off to a poor start in reading (and math) rarely catch up. We wait—they fail. But it does not have to be this way. (Lyon et. al. 2001 *Rethinking Learning Disabilities*)

Children with special education needs include those with developmental learning disabilities, learning disabilities due to genetic, medical, and neurological disorders, children with sensory impairment, intellectual impairment, and so forth. Because well over 50% of children with special education needs have learning disabilities (LDs) regardless of how or why learning difficulties arise, this paper focuses on what is known about closing the achievement gap for these children.

There have been steady increases in the number of children identified with LDs since the official designation of LDs in education almost 40 years ago, (Fletcher et al., 2007). The designation arose from social and political forces in recognition that the education of significant numbers of children was not being adequately served by existing disability categories. At the inception of this new designation there was relatively little research on LDs to guide identification, prevention, and intervention (Lyon et al., 2001). However, in the past two decades, significant progress has been made in understanding: whether our means of assessing and identifying children with LDs are reliable and valid (Fletcher et al., 2007); the neurobiological underpinnings of learning difficulties involving the brain and genes (Plomin & Kovas, 2005; Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2005); cognitive processes underlying both typical and atypical development of academic skills (Siegel, 2003); prevention strategies (Vaughn et al., in press); and evidence-based instructional and intervention practices (Swanson, Harris, & Graham, 2003). For word reading disability, or dyslexia, so much is known that there is a unifying theory explaining typical and atypical development of reading in relation to neurobiological and environmental factors as well as the effects of intervention on both brain and behaviour (Fletcher et al., 2007). These amazing advancements in knowledge have the potential to help children whose academic and vocational success are affected by what is arguably the most disabling learning disability. An overview of the research evidence on identification, prevention, and intervention – an understanding of which are critical for closing the achievement gaps in numeracy and literacy – is presented below.

Do our identification and assessment practices help or hinder the education of children with special education needs?

The diagnosis of LDs with reference to the measurement of intelligence or IQ and to exclusionary criteria (what does *not* qualify as an LD) has long guided the assessment and identification of children with learning difficulties. In some jurisdictions, these means of identifying LDs are written into law (reviewed in Barnes & Fuchs, in press). The validity of the IQ-achievement discrepancy and the use of exclusionary criteria to identify children with LDs is discussed below.

Often, an LD is identified when there is an IQ-achievement discrepancy; that is, when intelligence is markedly higher than academic achievement. Historically, the use of IQ-achievement discrepancy to identify LDs comes from an incorrect inference that IQ is a measure of learning potential (Share, McGee & Silva, 1989). It isn't (Neisser et al., 1996). Today, there is little scientific evidence for the usefulness of the discrepancy in identifying or treating LDs. Children with learning problems who show large or small IQ-achievement discrepancies (historically, the latter group has been called "slow learners") do *not* significantly differ from each other on a variety of dimensions such as: i) the cognitive processes that are deficient and that are the cognitive "causes" of the disability (phonological processing in both groups; Stanovich & Siegel, 1994); ii) the genetic and neural underpinnings of the learning difficulties (reviewed in Fletcher et al., 2007). For example, during reading, brain activation patterns of children with dyslexia "normalize" after intensive remediation regardless of the IQ-achievement discrepancy (Simos et al., 2000); iii) the level of reading acquired by the end of schooling (Francis et al., 1996); and iv) how quickly or how well interventions work (Vellutino et al., 2000). Furthermore, there are some decidedly negative consequences of using the discrepancy approach to identification. Discrepancy scores are notoriously unreliable as are all classifications based on a cut-point along a normal distribution (Francis et al., 2005). More importantly, using a discrepancy score to diagnose an LD means the LD is identified late because the psychometric properties of the tests used to assess IQ and achievement do not produce large discrepancies until about grade 2-3 (Fletcher et al., 2007). Yet, we know that the greatest benefit to children with learning difficulties is to intervene early in schooling (see Prevention section below).

LDs are also often identified by a set of exclusionary factors such that the LD must *not* be due to mental retardation; sensory disorders; linguistic diversity; emotional or behavioural disorders; social or cultural factors; or lack of appropriate educational experiences (Ministry of Education, Ontario; U.S. Department of Education). Although the first three of these exclusionary factors are reasonable there are problems with the latter three. First, many children with behavioural disorders such as ADHD have co-occurring LDs. One does not cause the other though cognitive and learning difficulties tend to be more severe when both disorders are present (Fletcher, 2005; Willcutt et al., 2001). Improving reading and math early in schooling appears to reduce or prevent later emotional problems such as depression (Kellam et al., 1994). In all, there is little empirical support for the idea that children should be excluded from being identified with an LD if they have emotional, behavioural, or social difficulties. Second, we know that social-economic and cultural factors interfere with the development of cognitive and language skills, which in turn increases the risk of academic difficulties culminating in LDs. For example, children who are socially and economically disadvantaged have vocabularies half the size of non-disadvantaged children at school entry (Hart & Risley, 1999), enter kindergarten with much less knowledge of the alphabet than their more advantaged peers (Whitehurst & Massetti, 2004), and begin school with less informal number and quantitative knowledge than children from middle income families (Case et al., 1999). Although disadvantaged children develop in environments that sometimes provide less than optimal support for the growth of those cognitive skills that are important precursors for the development of literacy and numeracy, they respond in similar ways to high quality instruction and interventions as their non-disadvantaged peers with or without LDs (Case et al., 1999; National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000). Thus the validity of exclusion on social and economic bases seems unwarranted. Third, excluding children from a diagnosis of LD if they have not had appropriate educational experiences assumes that instruction has been adequate and appropriate for that child. However, the provision of intervention early in a child's schooling and the child's response to that intervention should be made *before* costly and complex special education procedures are put into place to assess and identify children with LD (see Prevention section below).

What is the answer to identification if the traditional means of identifying those with learning disabilities does not hold up to scientific and practical scrutiny? How can we deal with the diversity of children who have

learning difficulties some of whom may be living in disadvantaged circumstances, some of whom may have a neurological disorder such as a head injury, a genetic disorder such as fragile X, or a behavioural or neurodevelopmental disorder such as ADHD or autism, and some of whom, for unknown reasons, just seem less able to learn how to read or do math than their peers? How do we ensure children's learning needs are identified early so that prevention programs are in place to reduce the incidence of later learning difficulties? How do we help children who do not respond to prevention programs or whose learning difficulties are caught late? The remainder of the paper delineates what is known about identification, prevention and intervention for children with LDs.

Prevention is often the cure.

The news on prevention of learning disabilities is good! First, several studies have shown that the incidence of LDs can be significantly decreased; in fact, up to 70% of later diagnosed LDs can be prevented with a combination of early screening, progress monitoring, and teaching that is responsive to early emerging learning problems (National Reading Panel, 2000). Second, we know that prevention works better for fixing some skills than does the best remediation we have to offer that is introduced later in schooling. For example, while certain reading interventions instituted after grade 2 can produce remarkable growth in word reading accuracy, reading fluency is stubbornly resistant to these best teaching practices (Torgesen, 2004). Programs that work on prevention of reading problems in kindergarten and grade 1, on the other hand, seem to remedy both reading accuracy and fluency.

The two cornerstones to prevention are **mass screening** for all children at school entry and in the early grades, and **progress monitoring** of children, particularly those who are at risk for learning difficulties. Mass screening techniques exist that can predict academic and behavioural difficulties in children in the first few years of schooling (Donovan & Cross, 2002). These are quick assessments that identify those at risk at a much earlier age than that using a more traditional referral model and so prevention programs can be put into place as early as kindergarten. Progress monitoring is typically carried out by the classroom teacher and is done more frequently than mass screening – from once a week to about once every three weeks. What is progress monitoring? It is the frequent monitoring of children's academic progress in relation to instruction. Progress monitoring tools are very sensitive to instructional change; they are widely available and easy and *very* fast to administer, taking only 1 to a few minutes at most; and, they are best at assessing phonological awareness, word reading accuracy, fluency, math and spelling and less adequate for assessing problems in reading comprehension and written composition. Examples are having a child complete math computations or read a short grade-appropriate passage for 1 to a few minutes depending on the tool used. For reading, the number of accurately read words is graphed over time and compared to the school's benchmarks that reflect expected outcomes for grade. But, why do more testing? And, what about the teacher's primary job – teaching children? Progress monitoring should be viewed as one of the most powerful tools available to teachers to produce change in their students. It puts assessment information directly in the hands of teachers, which is what is critical for providing immediate and frequent feedback on student progress. It is this juxtaposition of teacher-driven assessment in relation to previous and ongoing teaching that allows for more differentiation of instruction – a necessity for children at risk of learning difficulties (Stecker et al., 2005). Thus teachers in the early grades may increase the intensity or duration of instruction for children who are not responding to previous instruction. Although progress monitoring is a necessary component of prevention it is also extremely important for driving instruction for children who have special education needs regardless of what grade they are in.

Screening and progress monitoring firmly situate assessment in the service of intervention and privilege prevention and intervention over identification and traditional forms of LD assessment. It is important to realize that prevention programs, progress monitoring, and differentiated instruction all require considerable education, professional development, and institutional support, particularly for teachers in the primary grades

who are the first line of defense in the attempts to close achievement gaps for children at risk and for those with early emerging special education needs.

What happens when all attempts at prevention fail? What about the roughly 30% or more of children in studies who do not respond to best prevention and early intervention programs? When schools have prevention models in place children that do not respond to the instructional opportunities provided within the general education classroom are identified early. These students can then be provided with increasingly intensive interventions and their progress monitored. This is referred to as multiple tiers of instruction within general education (Vaughn et al., in press). Children who continue to show lack of progress may require highly specialized and intensive interventions partly outside of the general education classroom. But, when a prevention model is in place this situation represents the endpoint of the special education process, not the beginning.

In sum, educators need not wait for a diagnosis of LD to begin intervening with children who are at risk for learning difficulties or who are not progressing as expected. In fact, a combination of early screening, and instruction that is responsive to findings obtained from teacher-driven progress monitoring in kindergarten and grades 1 and 2 has the effect of reducing the later incidence of full-blown LDs. As is true for other societal problems, prevention is less expensive in terms of both financial and human resources, than is intervention and treatment. Waiting for a diagnosis of an LD is, as the quote at the beginning of this paper conveys, tantamount to “waiting for a child to fail”. But despite the best screening, high quality instruction in reading and math, and appropriate progress monitoring that drives differentiated instruction some children will fail to make much progress. The following instructional principles apply to these children, but you will see that they are also good instructional principles for children in general education (and see Principle 8). If high quality prevention and intervention programs are in place in the early primary grades, then the numbers of children needing special education later in schooling decreases. The flip side of this is that the resources, intensity and effectiveness of special education could be enhanced for those children who fail to respond to prevention and early intervention within general education.

Eight instructional principles for improving literacy and numeracy in children with special education needs (Fletcher et al., 2007)

1. **The instructional approach needs to be explicit and well-organized with opportunities for cumulative review.** One of the best sets of evidence for this type of instructional approach comes from the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) that conducted a meta-analysis of over 75 studies on the effectiveness of phonics instruction for improving reading. This analysis showed that those studies in which phonics was taught systematically and explicitly were more effective for improving reading than were programs in which phonics was implicit or not taught at all and in which phonics instruction was not systematic. The effects were greatest when phonics instruction was introduced in kindergarten and grade 1. Studies of math interventions are much less common than for reading and instructional programs for reading outnumber those for math by a factor of 6 to 1 (Ginsburg et al., 1998). However, the findings on instructional approach are similar for reading and math. Explicit teaching of math concepts and procedures results in increases in math achievement (Baker et al., 2002). Instruction for children with learning difficulties also needs to provide for cumulative review of previously instructed and seemingly mastered content. It is a frequent complaint of teachers and parents that children with learning difficulties seem to have a concept or a skill one day only to have it disappear the next. Research shows that these anecdotes are well-supported by evidence. Children with learning difficulties have problems in consolidating, retaining and transferring newly learned information and skills from one day to the next and from one situation to another. That is why cumulative review is so important for these children.

2. **Self-regulation strategies provide benefits over and above those provided by systematic explicit instruction.** These strategies directly involve students in setting goals for their academic performance and require them to monitor and chart their progress. For example, in instructional studies designed to improve math fact retrieval and arithmetic procedures or algorithms, students who selected their own learning goals had stronger learning than students who were assigned learning goals (Fuchs et al., 1989). In intervention studies of math problem solving, students who set goals and graphed and monitored their progress made the greatest gains (Fuchs et al., 2003).
3. **Peer Mediation is an effective method for extending scaffolded instruction and results in more acceptance by peers.** Peer-assisted learning strategies, also called collaborative learning, involve small-group instruction and students working together on specific learning activities. These practices are useful at the classroom level because they aid in classroom management and provide a means to deliver differentiated instruction (Jenkins & O'Connor, 2003). Many studies of math and reading have shown that pairing students who have stronger academic skills with those with weaker skills from kindergarten on improves outcomes for *all* students and provides opportunities for practice that help acquisition of new knowledge and transfer of skills and content knowledge (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). Furthermore, students with special education needs are better known and better liked by their peers in classrooms that practice peer assisted learning strategies (PALS website, Vanderbilt University).
4. **Skills based instruction needs to be integrated with instruction in higher level skills and weak foundational skills should not stop teaching of higher-level skills.** The NRP report discussed above provided clear evidence that simply adding more phonics instruction to the general education classroom or to programs for children with reading disabilities without incorporating instruction in other areas of reading such as fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension does *not* improve reading outcomes. The most effective prevention and intervention programs for both reading and math are comprehensive and integrate instruction in basic skills with higher-order skills. For example, the most successful early prevention programs for reading are those that provide explicit instruction in the alphabetic principle, that teach for meaning, and that provide opportunities for practice. Research also shows that impressive gains in higher order skills such as comprehension, written expression, and math problem solving can be achieved even when word decoding, spelling, and arithmetic are weak, but this only occurs if teachers are simultaneously instructing students in these higher-order skills (Wilder & Williams, 2001).
5. **Gains in literacy and numeracy are specific to instruction in literacy and numeracy.** For example, medication for children with ADHD plus reading disability may help ease some of the behavioural and cognitive manifestations of the ADHD, but will not cure the reading disability (Rabiner et al., 2004). Teaching academic content in one domain such as literacy will not result in transfer or improvement in another academic domain such as numeracy. Finally, despite some claims in the educational and psychological literature and the popular media, programs that provide training in neural, motor, visual, auditory, or cognitive processes that do not explicitly teach academic content, simply do not improve literacy or numeracy and result in lost time and resources that are better spent on addressing the core academic learning problems.
6. **Children are complex and so are their learning difficulties.** Most children with LDs have special education needs in more than one domain. For example, 50% of children with reading disabilities also have math disabilities (Shalev et al., 2000). Children with certain neurological and genetic conditions are at high risk for LDs (Barnes & Fuchs, in press). Children with spina bifida, for example, are at high risk for math disabilities, but not word reading disability (Barnes et al., 2006). This is powerful information to have in terms of prevention, monitoring progress and intervening when and if necessary. Even when a

child's academic difficulties are confined to only literacy or numeracy, these children may have accompanying difficulties in attention, memory, executive functions involving planning ahead and self-regulation, and so forth that complicate how the learning difficulties play out in the classroom and that may dilute the effectiveness of particular interventions (Fletcher et al., 1999; 2007). Fortunately, the cognitive sources of difficulties in reading and math and the interventions that help children to learn literacy and numeracy skills may be more similar than they are different across diverse groups of children (Barnes et al., 2006). This does not mean that other issues such as attention deficits do not need to be taken into account, but it does mean that high quality teaching practices may help many children even when co-occurring conditions are present. Nonetheless, the research base on how attention disorders and other cognitive, behavioural, and emotional difficulties affect learning difficulties and their interventions is sparse and this is clearly an area in need of increased research focus (Willcutt et al., 2005).

7. **Practice makes perfect.** The aim of any special education instruction, whether for prevention or intervention, is to *accelerate* growth and this requires that more time be spent on instruction, engagement, and practice in those areas in which the student has most difficulty. But there is a delicate balance that needs to be respected. Priorities in the primary and junior grades are learning to read, write and do math so additional instruction time in these areas may be necessary and appropriate. However, in the senior grades and in secondary school, additional instructional time spent on these skills may not be advisable if it reduces engagement in other important educational domains. Increased practice and engagement for students with special education needs often also means time on task spent outside of school hours. For example, time spent on reading connected text outside of school helps with reading fluency, acquisition of new vocabulary, and consolidation of word reading and comprehension skills taught in school for children with special education needs just as it does for typically achieving children.
8. **Special education and general education need better integration.** There are many effective interventions for problems in word reading and comprehension, math computations and problem solving, and spelling and written composition and many instructional components of these programs are similar to those that are effective in general education (see Lyon et al., 2006). If prevention and intervention programs are to be most effective for closing the achievement gap for children with special education needs there needs to be a better integration of instructional design across general education and special education. Effective prevention programs properly take place within general education. In turn, the general education classroom needs to be responsive to multiple tiers of effective general education in order for prevention to work. It is worth keeping in mind, however, that the best prevention programs will not address the learning difficulties of all children. Special education research and practice will need to focus on children who respond more slowly to or less well to our interventions.

The explosion of intervention and prevention research in the past decade, mainly in reading, but increasingly in math and writing, provide evidence for what works and what does not work for students with special education needs, though much remains to be studied. Although research provides some of the means for closing the achievement gap, it is worth remembering that educational “research is only as good as its implementation” (Fletcher et al., 2007, p. 274).

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Discussion Paper #3

***Helping Students Who Are Experiencing
Persistent and/or Serious Discipline
Problems to Succeed in School:
The State of the Evidence***

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Providing appropriate support for children and youth who experience serious discipline problems begins by understanding who these students are. It is not a case of “one size fits all”. Rather, effectiveness depends on the nature of the problem and its ultimate causes and contributing factors. This is a heterogeneous group of students who require a complex array of services and assistance, some of which may have been lacking throughout their school careers. Indeed, research on suspension by Morgan-D’Atrio and colleagues (1996) indicates that the majority of suspended youth from middle and high schools suffer from serious academic and/or social difficulties. Research and experience tell us that these students include at least three distinct but overlapping groups that have been studied within separate research traditions. We begin with an overview of what policy makers and educators need to know about each.

The first group includes students with serious emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) who tend to be overrepresented among students expelled or suspended from school (Cooley, 1995; Rose, 1998). Many students with EBD are identified and served through special education within schools, but many remain unidentified. Epidemiological studies show that about 20% of children and youth experience significant mental health problems, yet most are not diagnosed (Offord, 1986; Romano et al., 2001). Externalizing problems such as conduct disorders and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorders affect an estimated 4.2 and 4.8% of students (aged 4-17), respectively (Waddell & Sheppard, 2002). Disruptive problems such as these are often evident during childhood (e.g., median age of onset for impulse control disorders is 11 years, with most emerging between 7-15 years of age; Kessler et al, 2005; Wittchen, Kessler, Pfister, & Lieb, 2000), underscoring the need for school personnel to be familiar with the nature and symptoms of these disorders, as they may be the first to identify such problems. Longitudinal research by Pierce, Ewing and Campbell (1999) has shown that among those children identified “hard to manage” in preschool, 41% met clinical criteria for Oppositional Defiant Disorder or Conduct Disorder by age 13.

The second two groups include students who display aggressive and antisocial behavior. Over a century of research has shown that aggressive behavior among children and youth is associated with both short- and long-term adjustment problems such as criminality, unemployment, and mental health problems (see Coie & Dodge, 1998; Tremblay, 2000, 2003; Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2004) as well as school difficulties including grade retention (e.g., Rodney et al., 1999). However, experts have distinguished two groups of aggressive or antisocial youth (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, 4th Edition Text Revision, American Psychological Association, 2000). For a small but significant proportion of these children, antisocial behavior is evident early in childhood and maintained at a high level in adolescence, and these “early starter” (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992) or “life course persistent” (Moffitt, 1993) aggressive youth tend to display more extreme behavior. For the majority of “adolescent limited” aggressive youth (Moffitt, 1993, 2003), antisocial behavior peaks during adolescence but decreases thereafter. Their antisocial and aggressive behavior may reflect

discipline problems, increasing disengagement from school, reactions to an immediate serious stressor, or adolescent rebellion. Each group of students experiences distinct developmental trajectories that require tailored approaches to intervention.

Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD)

Within schools, children who exhibit moderate or severe emotional and behavioral problems are often served in special education. In BC schools, for example, students with EBD have consistently outnumbered students with learning disabilities since 2001, representing the *largest* group of students in special education (BC Ministry of Education, 2006). Children with EBD are recognized as being at risk, not only for poor interpersonal relationships, but also for limited school success, with a school failure rate of 50% (U.S. Department of Education, 2001; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995). These students pose significant problems for classroom teachers and are often unable to benefit from regular classroom instruction (Kauffman, 2005). EBD students are sometimes placed in special classes with reduced child:adult ratios and more intensive behavioral support. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2001), as many as 33% of the children receiving services for EBD receive 60% or more of their education outside the regular classroom; another 18% are educated in settings other than public school (e.g., separate or residential facility, hospital, etc.).

Early identification is key but complicated by the fact that there is a high degree of comorbidity (i.e., co-occurrence of disorders) among children diagnosed with EBD. Conservative estimates are that 10-30% of EBD students experience more than one psychological disorder (Tankersley & Landrum, 1997). Others suggest that comorbidity should be considered the rule rather than the exception (Angold, Costello & Erkanli, 1999; Armstrong & Costello, 2002; IDEA, 2004). The overlap of emotional and behavioral disorders with academic difficulties is also particularly noteworthy. For example, in the US about 25 to 50% of the students diagnosed with a learning disability (LD) also display social-emotional and/or behavioral disorders (e.g., Rock, Fessler, & Church, 1997). In an intervention study involving 22 students (grades 3-7) referred by teachers for significant behavioral difficulties (Hymel et al., 2005), educational assessments had only been completed on one student, despite the fact that the vast majority of students were rated by teachers as displaying clinically relevant levels of externalizing problems *and* school (academic) problems, reflecting a common misperception that these children display behavioral, not academic difficulties. Consistent with the notion that academic failure can have a domino-like effect, increasing risk, longitudinal research by McKinney (1989; McKinney & Feagans, 1984) indicates that elementary students with both LD and EBD demonstrate increased maladaptive behavior and decreased academic success over time. *“Lack of academic success can suppress further academic pursuit, reduce self esteem, and drive a student to greater affiliation with other students who have been “turned off” to the central objective of schooling”* (Hanley, 2003, p.328). Furthermore, academic support is often limited by categorical funding and support policies that permit only one “primary” disability designation (e.g., LD or EBD, but not both) (Altman, 1991; Schorr, 1991). Although new models of classification and service delivery for LD/EBD children have been proposed in the US (e.g., Rock et al., 1997), they have yet to be implemented in schools.

Aggressive and Antisocial Youth

A somewhat distinct literature has focused on aggressive and antisocial youth and has begun to change our understanding of childhood aggression. For example, although traditionally the focus has been on how and why some children learn to become aggressive, Tremblay (2000, 2003) argues that this focus may be inappropriate. Given that the highest levels of physical aggressive behavior are observed during the preschool years, Tremblay suggests that such behavior may be normative initially but decreases with age in response to socialization, as children learn alternatives to aggression for solving problems. For Tremblay, the critical question is why some children fail to benefit from such socialization processes and fail to learn to regulate their aggressive behavior. As another example, aggressive behaviour has traditionally been associated with low self-esteem, with the idea that aggression is used to enhance social dominance and bolster one’s sense of self worth. However, empirical evidence to support such a claim has been limited or mixed (see Baumeister,

Smart & Boden, 1996) and more recent research suggests that aggression may be linked to both low self-esteem and narcissism, or the tendency to deny one's negative characteristics as a defense aimed at protecting a fragile but high sense of self (e.g., Baumeister et al., 1996; Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffitt & Caspi, 2005). Thus, the motive behind aggressive or acting out behavior may vary across individuals. Finally, research on children's peer relations has long proposed that aggressive behavior is one of the most consistent correlates of peer rejection or low social status (Newcomb, Bukowski, & Pattee, 1993; Coie & Dodge, 1998; Rubin, Bukowski & Parker, 1998). However, other research indicates that actually only about 1/2 of the children who are aggressive are actually rejected by peers (Cillessen, van Ijzendoorn, van Liewhout, & Hartup, 1992) and at least some aggressive youth are actually popular, central members within the peer group (see Vaillancourt & Hymel, in press). Indeed, Vaillancourt, McDougall and Hymel (2003) found that over half of the students that peers nominated as "bullies" were in fact high status, popular students, viewed as popular and powerful by their classmates. Vaillancourt and colleagues further demonstrated that the links between peer status and aggressive behavior varies depending on whether individuals possess characteristics valued by the peer group. Aggressive students with characteristics that are valued by peers (attractive, athletic, stylish, etc.) enjoy considerable status and power and are seen as popular, whereas aggressive students who do not possess such characteristics are likely to be rejected by schoolmates. Research findings such as these have led to shifts in thinking about aggressive and antisocial behavior. Although aggressive youth have traditionally been characterized as disliked students who lack self-esteem and are socialized into aggressive behavior patterns, more recent research suggests that at least some aggressive youth are actually high status students who have a high but fragile sense of self but who have failed to benefit from typical socialization forces that encourage alternatives to violence.

Finally, research shows that aggressive behavior is not just a characteristic residing in the individual, but depends in large part on the social context in which students function. Studies indicate that aggressive children and youth are more likely to view aggressive behavior as normative (see Coie & Dodge, 1998; Guerra, Huesmann, & Hanish, 1995) and that children's approval of and admiration for aggressive peers tends to increase with age (e.g., Bukowski, Sippola, & Newcomb, 2000; Huesmann & Guerra, 1997). In addition to personal values and views of aggression, however, peer group norms and beliefs about aggression also contribute to the likelihood of such behaviour. For example, research shows that children who "morally disengage" from aggressive behaviors such as bullying, emphasizing personal benefits or justifying such behavior are more likely to bully others (Hymel, Rocke Henderson, & Bonanno, 2005; Menesini, Sanchez, Fonzi, Ortegba, Costabile & LoFeudo, 2003). However, beyond such personal beliefs, the degree to which the larger peer group values or justifies bullying behavior also contributes to the likelihood of such behavior (Vaillancourt et al. 2006). Thus, school-based efforts to address aggressive and antisocial behaviour must consider the social climate in which students function in addition to the aggressive students themselves when attempting to address such problems.

Adopting proactive ways of responding to students at risk

Addressing discipline problems in schools effectively requires a shift in thinking. Traditionally, our approach has been reactive, responding to immediate transgressions or outbursts, often in a punitive manner, offering supports only after a negative pattern of behavior has been established (e.g., Conroy, Hendrickson, & Hester, 2004). Indeed, the most common response to serious aggressive and oppositional behaviors includes suspension and expulsion. Understandably, in cases of severe transgression, priority is given to maintaining the safety of the larger student body. However, results of a nationally representative sample of 1,234 school principals or disciplinarians from the US suggests that administrators, when asked to identify the serious or moderate problems in their schools, were more likely to identify tardiness (40%), absenteeism (25%), and physical conflict between students (20%). More serious transgressions, such as drug use (9%), possession of weapons (2%) and physical abuse of teachers (2%) were seldom noted (National Centre for Education Statistics, Violence and Discipline Problems in US Public School, 1996-1997). However, Skiba and Peterson (1999) found that, although

the single most frequent reason for suspension was fighting between students, the majority of suspensions occurred in response to minor school infractions that did not directly impact school safety, including disrespect, disobedience, tardiness and truancy. Are such discipline tactics effective? Research evidence indicates that such reactive responses are of limited treatment utility, rarely produce lasting or meaningful changes in behavior and in fact can have unintended, deleterious effects on the students (see BC Ministry of Education report “Focus on Suspension”, 1999), including increased risk for school drop out (e.g., Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack & Rock, 1986). Recent reviews of school discipline practices suggests that such practices are inconsistently applied and that reliance on zero tolerance policies (including expulsion and suspension) and physical safety procedures does not appear to be associated with reductions in school violence and may in fact be associated with increased school “disorder” (Skiba & Peterson, 1999; 2000), leading to questions regarding the rationale of removing these students for safety reasons.

If suspensions and expulsions are ineffective, what other options exist? First, it would seem important for school administrators to find out *why* students were late or skipped school or engaged in a fight with another student and attempt to work with them to solve the problems in more socially acceptable ways. Students may have a variety of reasons for skipping school, including peer victimization and anxiety, owing primarily to peer maltreatment in school. Oppositional and conduct disordered youth may also be seeking support outside of the school context (Kearney & Albano, 2004). Reactive responses, including suspension and expulsion, typically address the symptoms, not the causes of behavior when it is possible, if not critical, to address both. Students who display aggressive and oppositional behaviors at school are expressing their need for help. Understanding the function and “communicative intent” of such behavior becomes a critical task for educators (see Brady & Halle, 1997 on functional assessment practices).

Despite the seriousness of their transgressions, it is important to remember that these are children, still developing a sense of self, an understanding of the world, and a mature sense of morality. In doing so, educators would benefit from viewing such transgressions as a teaching moment rather than a discipline problem, helping children to find alternative ways to address the problems that they face, some of which cannot be addressed without adult support. This requires that teachers, who often report feeling ill-equipped to handle classroom management (Bullock, Ellis, & Wilson, 1994; Maag & Katsiyannis, 1999), receive appropriate training, recognizing that teachers are required to address multi-faceted problems while maintaining classroom decorum and attending to 25 to 30 students’ academic needs. Indeed, even simple techniques such as increased use of positive reinforcement have been shown to decrease suspension and dropout (see Skiba & Peterson, 2000). However, teachers need to have a variety of techniques at their disposal in order to effectively address disruptive behavior before it escalates. They also need to recognize that behavior difficulties often reflect underlying academic difficulties. Treating the behavior directly may not get at the underlying problem, be it interpersonal or academic. However, the effectiveness of any technique depends on the relationship the teacher has with his/her students.

To effectively work with students who have significant discipline and behavioral challenges, it is critical for educators to understand the importance of relationships – relationships between students and teachers, relationships with other students, and ultimately, the child’s relationship to the school. A growing body of research demonstrates the importance of student bonding to school, to classmates, and to teachers. According to attachment theorists (e.g., Ainsworth, 1963; Bowlby, 1969, 1973), human beings are biologically predisposed to develop and maintain emotional bonds with others and recent research from social neuroscience confirms that we are “wired to connect” with others (Goleman, 2006). Human beings need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and academic motivation theorists have now recognized that one’s sense of belonging is critical for optimal learning in school (Ryan & Powelson, 1991). Students who lack a sense of belonging or bonding to school are at risk for school failure and other negative outcomes (e.g., Cernkovich & Giordano, 1992; Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko & Fernandez, 1989) including delinquency (Jenkins, 1997). In

contrast, students who are more engaged in extracurricular activities not only feel a greater sense of school belonging, but are also less likely to dropout or engage in antisocial behavior or delinquent activities (Mahoney, 2000; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997).

Teachers are the key to creating a caring and safe educational environment for their students. Indeed, teacher warmth and support are critical in helping children achieve and thrive, even (and perhaps especially) high-risk children. Two studies illustrate this point. First, Hamre and Pianta (2005) compared a sample of high-risk first graders assigned to classrooms in which teachers provided emotional support regularly through everyday interactions, to a group of high risk students assigned to less supportive classrooms. By the end of grade 1, those in more supportive classrooms demonstrated better achievement and less conflict with teachers. Teacher support of this kind, even as early as grade 1, may have significant implications for later student behavior. When Kellam, Rebok, Ialongo and Mayer (1994) randomly assigned first graders to classrooms that were either chaotic or well managed, they found that students' odds of becoming aggressive in middle school depended on the classroom management experienced early on. Among those students who began school as highly aggressive (according to their teachers), the odds of being identified as highly aggressive in middle school were 3:1 for those who had been assigned to well-managed classrooms, as compared to 59:1 for those who had been assigned to chaotic or poorly managed classrooms. These results underscore the importance of *early* positive teacher support for high risk, aggressive children. The challenge is to give teachers the skills needed to individualize support as needed while attending to the needs of a broad range of students. Attachment theory offers further insights regarding the importance of building positive teacher-student relationships, especially for high risk, aggressive and antisocial youth, with recent theoretical arguments regarding the links between poor attachment and aggression (Moretti, DaSilva & Holland, 2004) as well as decades of experience verifying the value of creating positive relationships when working with troubled youth (see Hayden 1989; Watson, 2003).

Peer relationships also matter. Two decades of research has shown that students who experience social difficulties and who are not well accepted within the classroom peer group are at risk for a number of negative long-term adjustment outcomes (see McDougall, Hymel, Vaillancourt & Mercer, 2001) and aggressive behavior is one of the major contributors to peer rejection (see Newcomb, Bukowski, & Pattee, 1993; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998). Being rejected by mainstream peers limits the child's opportunities for positive interactions with prosocial peers, and increases the likelihood of affiliation with other, equally rejected or aggressive peers who are more likely to provide models and support for deviant peer behavior (Parker & Asher, 1987) or what has come to be known as *peer deviancy training* (Dishion McCord, & Poulin, 1999). Peer rejection is predictive of academic difficulties (see McDougall et al., 2001 for a review), including greater likelihood of early school drop out (Hymel, Comfort, Schonert-Reichl & McDougall, 1996). Helping high-risk students to develop and maintain affiliations with prosocial peers is a worthwhile endeavour and may be a critical part of effective intervention.

Practical implications and future directions for research.

Schools are faced with the enormous and complex task of educating high risk students, a diverse group who display disruptive behaviors that compromise their own learning and that of others. However, these students are easily misunderstood. Suspensions and expulsions do little to help students with the difficulties they face. Based on the research reviewed above, we offer the following suggestions.

1. Early identification and intervention are critical.
2. Assessment and intervention for children with discipline problems must consider both behavioral and academic challenges that these children face and address both, as needed.

3. In order to provide an optimal classroom and school climate in which all students succeed, teachers need extensive training, beyond classroom management, that includes foundational knowledge in mental health, group processes and the most effective intervention strategies available. Teachers who work directly with high risk youth require more specialized training.
4. Prevention and intervention efforts should emphasize evidence-based practices (e.g., see www.casel.org) but should also include evaluation regarding the effectiveness of any efforts undertaken.
5. School-wide efforts to foster social-emotional learning and create a positive school climate are needed in all schools in order to create a safe and caring learning environment in which negative behavior is not encouraged.
6. Individualized supports are needed for students with chronic and/or serious behavioral problems, working in collaboration with outside agencies when appropriate. Recognizing that all students have strengths as well as weaknesses, assessment and intervention efforts need to be tailored to meet the specific needs of each student.
7. Expulsions/suspensions, if used at all, should be reserved for the most serious behaviors but should not be implemented without adequate follow-through on the part of schools.
8. Alternatives to suspension such as restitution (Gossens, 1992) or restorative practices must be considered.
9. Schools can begin by aiming to improve the school climate which can be promoted on a school-wide and individualized basis.

From a cost-benefit analysis, schools represent an ideal context for supporting high risk youth and the effort may be well worth it. Indeed, economist Cohen (1998) estimated that every high risk youth who drops out of school costs society \$232,000 to \$388,000 (US\$) and each high risk youth who becomes a career criminal costs society \$1.3 to \$1.5 million (US\$) in terms of external costs over their lifetime, in terms of such things as medical wages, incarceration, lost wages, stolen property, criminal justice system costs, etc.. Investing in our youth by shifting our focus from discipline to care is an investment well worth making.

Appendix A

Suggestions for Further Reading

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Discussion Paper #4

***Fresh Starts/False Starts:
A Review of Literature on the Transition from
Elementary to Secondary School***

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Introduction

In an effort to retain more youth in school and to provide opportunities for student success, the Ontario Ministry of Education has implemented Phase III of the Student Success Strategy. One goal of this effort is attending to the pathways and transitions of students from elementary to secondary school in the Grade 8 to Grade 9 Transition Planning Initiative.

As a follow-up to this initiative, the Ministry is funding a research project to facilitate the transition process. Led by Dr. Bruce Ferguson and Dr. Kate Tilleczek, this research project will engage a team of expert researchers to examine the ways in which young people, parents, and educators experience and negotiate the transition. The first phase of the project is a review of the literature.³ This paper provides an abbreviated and selected overview of that review to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are elementary to secondary school transitions and how are they best conceptualized?
- 2) What works in facilitating transitions?
- 3) What are the practical implications of what we know?
- 4) What are the gaps in knowledge and directions for future research?

Conceptualizing Transitions

Although variations occur, most students leave elementary school and move into some form of secondary school during early adolescence. This transition has been recognized as a stumbling point for students, particularly for those who are at-risk (Lord et al, 1994; Seidman et al, 1994). The movement is commonly associated with dips in academic achievement, dips in self-esteem, and increased social anxiety (Alspaugh, 1998; Eccles et al, 1997; Galton, et al, 2003). As identified in the Early School Leavers Study (2005)⁴, an at-risk youth is one who is unlikely to graduate on schedule with the skills and self-confidence necessary to have meaningful options in work, culture, civic affairs, and relationships. Being poor has long been understood to be the most critical risk condition

³ For the complete literature review report, see Tilleczek & Ferguson (forthcoming)

⁴ For complete report see Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Rummens (2005)

for youth across many outcomes and the pervasiveness of the socioeconomic gradient effect has been documented in detail (Keating and Hertzman, 1999).

Transitions are best seen as temporal processes which cross social, academic, and procedural issues. Transitions entail changes in school cultures, increased academic demands, rotary systems, and shifts in peer groups which can be difficult to negotiate (Hargreaves, 1990). Progressive researchers and policy makers locate their work in the lives of young people and their educators. In so doing, research focuses on the ways in which risk and protective factors fluctuate over time and intersect individual and cultural factors. Literature on adolescent development suggests the presence of *nested transitions* (Tilleczek, forthcoming) as follows:

- Transition from childhood to adulthood over the life course
- Transitions along pathways to success through schools, communities, and families
- Transitions from elementary to secondary school within these larger transitions
- Transitions are both growth inducing and potential tipping points; both false/fresh starts

This framework opens up discussion to wider issues of the fit between schools, communities, and the lives of young people rather than simply targeting student habits and academics. Many such strategies have been suggested in the literature and are selectively reviewed here.

Three useful organizing principles - *being, becoming, and belonging* - have emerged as ways to categorize transitions strategies (Tilleczek, forthcoming; Tilleczek, 2004). Young people are in constant motion and tension between being and becoming. They are in process of *being* themselves in their everyday lives. This includes issues of forging identities through daily negotiations at school, home, community, work, and with friends. As such, they need to be valued for who they are today and to find places to belong. However, young people are also in a state of *becoming* young adults. They are engaged in the *nested transitions*. In this cause, teachers become human developers both over the life course and in the everyday lives of youth.

Researchers have found that many young people at the threshold of secondary school are hopeful about the potential of their new status, school, friends, and education (Graham & Hill, 2003). Kirkpatrick (2004) has reported that students look forward to this *fresh start* and are adept at making new friends for positive academic and social purposes. Some students report coping better than expected, enjoying new freedoms, and involvement in extra-curricular activities (Akos, 2004).

A contradiction exists, however, in that many students also express anxiety about the transition. Poor and immigrant youth state that they expected things to be easier than they actually turned out (Graham and Hill, 2003). An emotional paradox exists at this transition point, as it does at many life junctures. Students are both excited and anxious, both doubtful and hopeful. The most pervasive source of anxiety is the loss of status at precisely the time when they are moving toward adulthood (Tilleczek, 2006; Graham and Hill, 2003; Hargreaves, 1990). Dips in self-perception and learner identities are pervasive (Silverthorn et al, 2005). Given the importance of status to adolescents, the social and academic implications are obvious.

Academic concerns such as homework, pressure to do well, and potential drops in achievement are paramount for students and parents (Akos, 2004). Social concerns such as getting lost, bullying, and making friends (Schumacher, 1998) are prevalent, perceived risks. Beyond the negotiation of the transition, structural problems are imagined and/or experienced by students. Of concern are the size and layout of secondary schools, the time table, complicated schedules, being bullied, not knowing anyone, getting lost, and having multiple teachers (Graham & Hill, 2001; Schumacher, 1998). The aspect most troubling in relation to school work was the increase in homework (Graham and Hill, 2001). Kirkpatrick (2004) has reported that students often feel that the *honeymoon is over* after the initial adjustment phase to secondary school. At later phases, academic issues take precedence over social and procedural issues, leading students to express dissatisfaction and disappointment.

What works in facilitating transitions?

Given this contradiction and its inherent risks, how have educators worked to facilitate the transition? Researchers have found that students have more positive transitions into schools that modify social cultures to increase a sense of belonging and care than did students in schools that did not (Eccles & Midgley et al, 1996; Keating, 1996). In an effort to facilitate transitions for immigrant adolescents, Lucas (1996) studied exemplary programs. He concludes that these programs generally make schools function as communities which build bridges between students, parents, teachers and communities. The application of a “family of schools” model to bridge school cultures looks promising.

Transition programming was also helpful when including tours, teacher visits to primary school, and induction days (Graham and Hill, 2003). Galton et al (2003) found that promoting dialogue between elementary and secondary teachers on content, assessment, and pedagogy was critical to positive transitions. Elementary schools which introduce rotation systems were found to better prepare students (Schumacher, 1998).

A host of specific and practical strategies which enhance transitions is emerging from the Literature Review. Table 1 provides my conceptual synopsis as organized at three levels: macro (cultural); meso (classes, friends, family); and micro (youth and teachers as individuals).⁵

⁵ Table 1 has been compiled from multiple studies which use various methodologies. For a complete list of references and comments on methodological rigor, see Tilleczek & Ferguson (forthcoming)

Table 1: Synopsis of Factors Which Facilitate the Transition

<p>Macro Level (Culture and School Structure)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend to social class, gender, and ethnicity, anti-racism, anti-classism, and bullying awareness • Attend to school-development fit, belonging, friends, teacher training on youth culture and development • Attend to continuities and discontinuities in elementary and secondary school cultures (structures, practices, pedagogy, assessment, curriculum, teaching, etc) • Create well coordinated transitions, decrease adjustment time, keep what works, document, describe, communicate, evaluate, adequate information for students and families, focus on long-term adjustment not just immediate movement • Get administrative work out of the way so that students can focus on school and social events in first weeks • Engage across panels (parents, students, and teachers) with multiple strategies (letters, hotline, websites, visits, clear timetables, open house, handbooks, maps, meet teachers, ongoing meetings of personnel, internet chats, teacher/student cross-visits) • Make time lines and transition plans for each student and parent (attend to at-risk early in elementary school) • Redirect efforts and funds, assess human and financial supports, identify adult leaders in schools • Note complexity of “families of schools” model, multiple feeder school possibilities and issues, fewer transitions the better for students
<p>Meso Level (Classes, Friends, Families)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on teaching style/care, similarities across schools, student input in seating plans, work partners, class activities, sense of belonging, teachers as human developers • Focus on pedagogical issues/similarities across panels, less competitive pedagogy in grade 9, use friends, make friends, task-focused strategies • Focus on friendships, peer groups and influence, continuity in peer groups, connect students to friends/peers/classmates (seating plans, working groups) • Focus on shifts in parental/peer relations which occur at the time of transition; parents require more information at precisely the time youth distance from parents • Focus on counselling & outreach, Student Success Teachers, community and parental input • Focus on core/bridging curriculum across schools, language across the curriculum, post-

<p>induction programs for study and organizational skills, elementary booster classes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus on student success/fresh starts front load success, courses known to inspire success• Focus on issues of assessment and its practice and meaning across panels, focus on dips in achievement per subject• Focus on all four pillars of numeracy, literacy, pathways and care/culture/community
<p>Micro (Youth and Teachers)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Primary students are positive and excited about the transition (build on this!); youth should know that some anxiety is expected and appropriate• Help youth commit to learner identities and belonging, acknowledge strengths, prior achievements, create fresh starts, avoid old labels, students can “unlearn” math, language and reading, change “shirkers” to “workers”, friends important, self-perception dips are lasting, set clear goals• Support at-risk students, look beyond regular assessment data when tracking risk, look to how risk factors play out in class (e.g. boys who are meeting targets but not challenged)• Engage youth and friends in the transition process at all levels and stages• Students/parent focus on school, academics, administration, and social issues• Teachers are human developers, teachers are also in transition, teachers need support

Practical Implications

Practically speaking, Table 1 provides a host of evidence-based practices that can be used in transition programming. We should attend to the coherence of transition initiatives that are already in place. We should also balance our pre/during/post transition activities and funds (time, resources, etc), and begin to mark student social maturity by increasing responsibilities which allow for status, belonging, and confidence (Galton, 1993). In remaining aware of the *nested transitions* which young people are making, a longer conceptual view and more enduring practices can be enacted (Tilleczek, forthcoming).

Research shows that more needs to be done to facilitate transitions and that educators have the ability to do so. In secondary school, teacher beliefs about friendships, academic interests and youth as motivated learners need to be improved. Procedural strategies allowing more interaction with teachers are helpful, as are transitional approaches to assessment, curriculum, and pedagogy. Students advise their fellow students to a) be aware that secondary school is not that frightening, b) make friends, c) talk to people about emotions, and d) do not listen to rumours (Kirkpatrick, 2004). We are in a position to facilitate these and other goals.

Gaps in knowledge and future directions

Seventeen years ago, Hargreaves (1990) conducted a literature review on research about schooling in the transition years in Ontario. He concluded then that “the tragedy of the transition years is not that students experience anxiety on transfer to secondary school. The tragedy is that this anxiety passes so quickly, and that the students adjust so smoothly to the many uncomfortable realities of secondary school life. These realities...can restrict achievement, and depress motivation (especially among the less academic) sowing the seeds for dropout in later years” (p. 214)

Since that time, a good deal of research has been conducted on the risk and protective factors surrounding the transition from elementary to secondary school. Unfortunately, this research has suggested that the tragedy outlined by Hargreaves (1990) has not been fully appreciated. The Early School Leavers Study (2005) has since demonstrated that educators and schools have room to become more proactive, caring, and understanding in order to encourage student success and engagement. Similarly, the transition from elementary to secondary school, as a potential tipping point for young people, requires further attention at administrative, academic, and social levels. The current Grade 8 to Grade 9 Transition Planning Initiative of the Ontario Ministry of Education is taking a considerable step in this direction. As yet, there has been little research conducted in the Canadian or Ontario context. It is time to take stock of what is already in place and what/how it is working for whom.

After presenting this abbreviated synopsis of the research, I suggest that the largest gap in knowledge remains in understanding fully the *meso* level. The *meso* level is where intersections between culture and individual meet and where we can best begin to appreciate and describe the intersections of daily lives of young people with teachers, friends, peers, and parents. It is at this level where the experience and embodiment of social class, poverty, ethnicity, identity and age are played out. While researchers have addressed such issues as important “variables” in quantitative studies, we still need to capture the meaning and experience of the ways in which they work in school. This allows for research which can ask and answer more difficult questions. For instance: How are the problems of transition organized socially? What meanings do young people, parents, and educators make of the transition and why? How do students experience poverty, racism, and bullying in school? How do these experiences organize their learning? What roles do friends and peers play in academic and social support? Is the dip in academic achievement and self-esteem at transition an artifact of assessment and curricular shift? What would it look like if we placed the social, cognitive and physical needs of youth at the centre of transition and class room practices? What place does the body and puberty have in making nested transitions? What does it mean to be at-risk? Are labels useful or harmful and why?

A focus on the *meso* level invites a complementarity of multiple-method research strategies which are lacking in this field of study (Tilleczek, 2004). Since transitions are nested, temporal, and process based, we need to address issues and mechanisms before, during, and after the shift to secondary school. Long-term qualitative research will be an asset in this field as we begin to more adequately map out processes, experiences, narratives, and meanings of transition over time. We need to understand which barriers and facilitators are shorter term, and which are longer term and why. Such momentum will help us to capitalize on *fresh starts* and avoid *false starts* which have long-term detrimental effects for students.

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Discussion Paper #5

***What Have We Learned About
 Reading Comprehension?***

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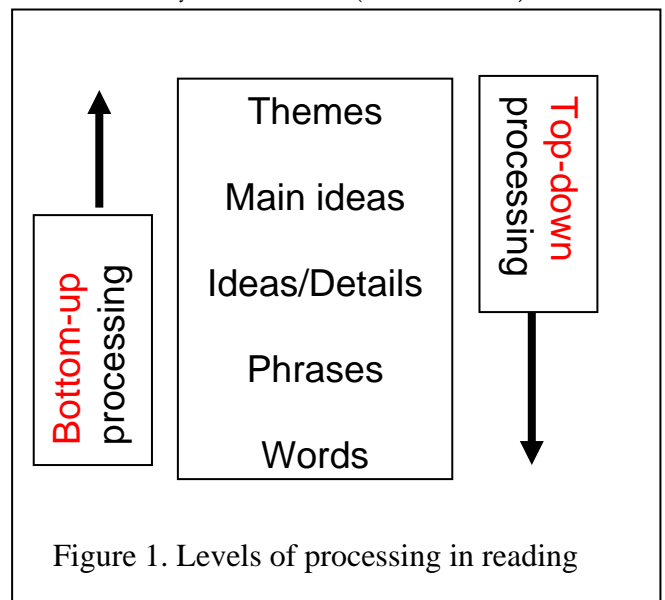


Reading comprehension, the basis for much learning, working, and enjoyment, is extraordinarily complex, and our knowledge about it is far too deep and extensive for five pages. I review *some* of what we have learned about it in recent years by addressing four questions.

1. What is it?

Reading comprehension is the application of a skill that evolved for other purposes (listening or oral comprehension) to a new form of input (text). Unlike listening comprehension, reading comprehension is not something for which our brains have evolved. Whereas oral comprehension seems to develop “naturally” with minimal deliberate intervention, reading comprehension is more challenging and requires deliberate instruction. Humans have been doing oral comprehension for 100,000 years or more (Donald, 1991), and virtually all humans do it; reading comprehension has only been practiced for 5,000 years, and for most of that time most humans did not do it (Olson, 1994). It should not be surprising that it is difficult.

Gough and Tunmer (1986) proposed the *simple view* of reading, in which reading comprehension (RC) is seen as the product of Decoding (D) and Listening Comprehension (LC); thus, $RC = D \times LC$. Though simple, this approach does a remarkably good job of accounting for the data (e.g., Johnston & Kirby, 2006), and it reminds us that the ability to decode words is absolutely essential for skilled reading; those with *either* very low decoding skill or very low oral comprehension skill will be poor reading comprehenders. Decoding or word reading is often the bottleneck that prevents readers from attaining higher adequate text comprehension (see Figure 1). I would add two important factors beyond decoding and listening comprehension, fluency and strategies. Fluency (speed and expression; e.g., Kuhn & Stahl, 2003) is not an issue in listening, as the speaker controls the pace, but is needed for reading comprehension because of working memory constraints (see below). Strategies (e.g., Dole et al., 1991) are important in reading, and more useful than in listening, because the text stays present and allows re-inspections. We expect skilled readers to extract more from text than they would from speech, and some of that comes from more strategic, goal-directed, deliberate processing. Strategies are conscious, goal-oriented plans that call on tactics which can



vary from *underline long words to create a mental simulation to see if the author is right* (Kirby, 1988). Strategies depend on prior knowledge (of content, and of strategies) and on the learners' intentions; intentions can be characterized as combinations of deep and surface processing (Biggs, 1993), or depth and breadth (Kirby & Woodhouse, 1994).

The mystery left to be explained is listening comprehension, the comprehension processes that are at the heart of reading comprehension. Comprehension is the core of verbal ability or intelligence, and can call on nonverbal processes too. Comprehension involves the *relating* of two or more pieces of information (e.g., Kintsch, 1999). Those pieces of information can come from long-term memory (prior knowledge), but in reading comprehension at least one piece must come from the text. The pieces of information can be simple or quite complex ideas, ranging from *cat* to *democracy*. The relating can also be of many sorts, such as *is an example of, is the same as, causes, or acts on in a specified way*. The information to be integrated is held in working memory (Baddeley, 1986), and the relating operation takes up space there too. (Working memory is limited in capacity, in terms of the number of units that can be held at once, but not in the size of the units that can be held.) As we read, we update our mental representation of the text's meaning; these mental representations are known as mental models (Johnson-Laird, 1983) or situation models (Kintsch, 1999).

What are those *pieces of information*? They are the different types of content shown in Figure 1, for instance words, ideas, main ideas, or themes. As information is processed, the lower-level units (words or parts of words) are integrated into higher-level units; long-term memory stores some low-level information, but comprehension relies critically upon higher-level, more abstract or schematic information. The abstract information in long-term memory is stored in the form of *schemas*, which function like generalized mental or situation models. For readers with rich knowledge, a word such as *democracy* evokes and brings to life many ideas without taking up additional working memory space; for readers with less relevant knowledge, the word itself may take up one or more spaces, with no additional information brought along "for free". Comprehension is enhanced when the contents of working memory are higher-level units; children struggling to identify words are unlikely to be able to attain even modest levels of comprehension. When lower-level units are recognized automatically, there is a greater chance of higher levels being attained. It is critical to build up the automaticity of the lower-level units (e.g., words).

Finally, it is important to recognize different types or levels of comprehension. I distinguish among three: passive comprehension (what we do when we are following a text but not analyzing or assessing it deeply), comprehension for learning (what we do when we try to remember the details and/or deeper meanings of a text), and self-regulated comprehension (what we do when we are using text to achieve our own goals). Which of these a reader employs will depend on ability, purpose, and instruction.

2. Where does it come from?

The previous section mentioned a number of factors involved in reading comprehension; these and their antecedents can be seen as the causes or sources of reading comprehension (see Figure 2). As shown in the Figure, vocabulary knowledge (Wagner et al., 2007) and prior knowledge are thought to be contributors to listening comprehension, though both and many other factors shown are also related to verbal intelligence. It is difficult to see how readers can understand a text if there are too many unknown words or concepts.

Over the last 25 years or so, we have learned a great deal about how the brain accomplishes the lower-level aspects of reading, especially decoding (e.g., Adams, 1990; Rayner et al., 2001). We know that a number of factors contribute to word reading, including phonological awareness (Stanovich, 2000), naming speed (Wolf & Bowers, 1999), orthographic knowledge (Levy et al., 2006), morphological awareness (Deacon & Kirby, 2004), and phonics knowledge (Adams, 1990).

Fluency is less well understood (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003), but clearly depends upon decoding efficiency, and cognitive and naming speed (Wolf & Bowers, 1999). As fluency drops, it becomes less and less likely that the needed information is still active in working memory, making comprehension less and less likely.

Reading comprehension strategies have been studied extensively (National Reading Panel, 2000, chapter 4). Dole et al. (1991) listed 5 major strategies, each of which is associated with greater reading comprehension: determining importance, summarizing information, drawing inferences, generating questions, and monitoring comprehension.

None of these factors has much influence in the absence of motivation and interest. Most children begin being interested in reading, but lose interest/motivation if their skills are not adequate or if the text content does not suit them.

3. Who is bad at it?

The factors listed in the previous section suggest the characteristics that will lead to poor reading comprehension. Children with low levels of skill in the various contributing factors will struggle with reading comprehension, children with more areas of low skill will struggle more, and the more they struggle the more their interest will suffer, creating a vicious circle. It is no secret that many children prefer other activities to reading, and that text content can turn a capable into an unenthusiastic reader very quickly (Pressley, 2002, chapter 8).

Two subgroups deserve mention. First, it should be no surprise that children with reading disabilities have difficulties in reading comprehension (Cornoldi & Oakhill, 1996), as these children's most obvious problem, word reading, is critical for reading comprehension. However it is important to recognize that some reading disabled children can develop adequate or even good levels of reading comprehension, especially if time constraints are not imposed (Lefly & Pennington, 1991). It is not yet clear how they do this, but it almost certainly involves a great deal of practice, re-reading, and strategy use.

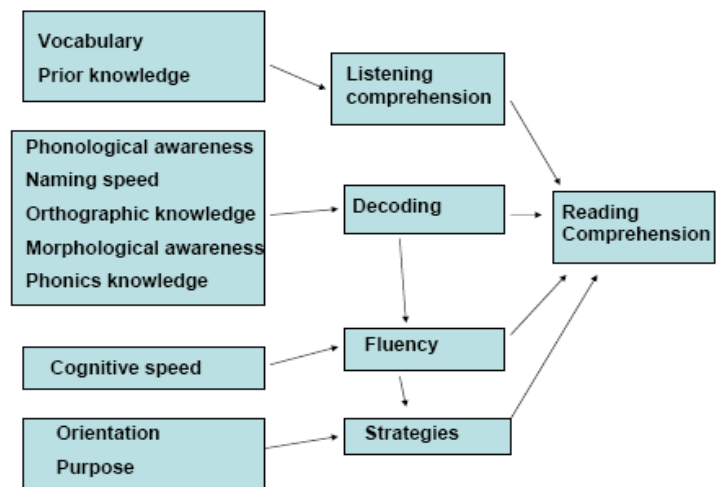


Figure 2. Causes/sources of reading comprehension.

Secondly, some authors refer to a group of children termed *poor comprehenders* (e.g., Nation, 2005). These children are described as having normal word level processing, but some language comprehension difficulties that interfere with reading comprehension. These language difficulties involve drawing inferences, understanding figurative language, and monitoring their own comprehension. Most current approaches to reading disability will miss these children, who may need intensive language-oriented intervention.

4. How should we measure it?

A crucial component to understanding reading comprehension is its measurement. There exist many very different methods of measuring reading comprehension, including multiple choice questions after short passages, fill-in-the-blanks cloze tests, short-answer constructed response tests, and much longer constructed responses such as text retelling and summarizing. There is growing recognition that these different measures do not necessarily assess the same things. For example, multiple choice questions are efficient to score, but may not do a good job of assessing higher-level comprehension skills such as in situation model construction. Essay questions may seem more valid, but may allow children with more extensive prior knowledge to conceal their reading comprehension difficulties. Poor performance on constructed response questions may reflect writing more than reading problems. See Paris and Stahl (2005) for recent reviews of assessment issues.

It seems clear that what is needed is a broadly-based and comprehensive approach to assessment, one in which the types of task are tailored to the purpose of the assessment, and one in which initial, somewhat simplistic assessments are followed up with certain children with more extensive and intensive assessments. Assessments should make sense in terms of what we know about the cognitive processes involved, and should respect individual differences in interests, etc. Educationally, it is essential that at least some of the assessments be *instructionally sensitive*, i.e., that they are able to show the effects of instructional interventions, and that they yield applicable feedback to teachers and learners (see Sweet, 2005; RAND Reading Study Group, 2002).

Conclusion and implications

Reading comprehension is a complex process in itself, but it also depends upon other important and complex lower-level processes. It is a critical foundation skill for later academic learning, many employment skills, and life satisfaction. It is an important skill to target, but we should not forget about the skills on which it depends. To improve the reading comprehension skills of poor performers, we need to understand that there is no “magic wand” hidden in Figure 2, no secret weapon that will quickly improve reading matters for all poor readers. Careful assessment is required to determine individual children’s strengths and weaknesses, and programs tailored accordingly; most children will need continued support in many areas. The roots of many reading comprehension problems lie in the early elementary years; waiting to address them in high school is a high-risk strategy.

I suggest that the information reviewed here has implications for regular classroom instruction, special education, educational assessment, and teacher education.

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Discussion Paper #6

***Word Study and Reading Comprehension:
Implications for Instruction***

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Reading comprehension is a complex undertaking that involves many levels of processing. One of the most fundamental aspects of comprehension is the ability to deal with unfamiliar words encountered in text. Readers who struggle with word-level tasks use up valuable cognitive space that could be allotted to deeper levels of text analysis. It is not enough to rely on context cues to predict the meaning of new words, since this strategy often results in erroneous or superficial understandings of key terms, especially in content-area reading (Paynter, Bodrova, & Doty, 2005). Mature readers need to possess a basic knowledge of “how words work” and a set of strategies for approaching new words encountered throughout the day.

This paper examines the interrelationships of spelling and vocabulary as they impact reading comprehension, and focuses on instructional approaches that foster word-level knowledge. Most of the examples and research cited will be geared to the junior and intermediate divisions, although the same general conclusions can be applied to all grade levels.

How word knowledge affects reading comprehension

Vocabulary knowledge is one of the best predictors of reading achievement (Richek, 2005). Bromley (2004), in a comprehensive review of research on vocabulary development, concludes that vocabulary knowledge promotes reading fluency, boosts reading comprehension, improves academic achievement, and enhances thinking and communication.

Spelling is also an important consideration in reading comprehension. The concepts about sound patterns that children learn in the early years through invented spelling and direct spelling instruction help them to decode new words in their reading. As they mature and begin to spell longer and more complex words, children apply the concepts of base words, prefixes, and suffixes to their spelling. This knowledge of morphology, in turn, helps them to deconstruct longer words encountered in their reading. Templeton (2004) argues that spelling knowledge provides the basis for explicit awareness and understanding of morphology, which, in turn, may guide the systematic growth of vocabulary knowledge. Considering the strength of vocabulary knowledge in predicting reading achievement, the complex interrelationships among these areas are significant.

Stanovich (1986) describes the cumulative effect of poor reading and vocabulary skills. Children who are poor readers usually also lack a wide vocabulary. When young children struggle with reading, they quite naturally read less than their more able classmates, and therefore are exposed to fewer new words. This restriction on their vocabulary growth, in turn, makes progress in reading even harder. The effect of these deficits makes learning in general more difficult, and as children progress through the grades, the gap between skilled and less skilled readers becomes increasingly pronounced.

What it means to “know words”

Skilled language users display “word consciousness” (Blachowicz, Fisher, Ogle, & Watts-Taffe, 2006). They have a metacognitive understanding of how words are built, and can articulate the strategies they employ as readers to solve unfamiliar words. Cognitive developmental research (Beers & Henderson, 1977; Read, 1971; Templeton, 1983) has shown that most children acquire an understanding of word structure in a progressive, stage-like manner. Through oral language, an exposure to written texts, and their own writing, they begin as young children to explore the patterns of sound, or graphophonemic concepts. In the middle grades, most students are able to add simple affixes to base words and to grasp the rules for making words plural, changing verb tenses, forming possessives and contractions, and adjusting the spelling of base words when adding affixes such as *-ed* and *-ing*. Older students use morphological knowledge to apply the *spelling/meaning connection* to words derived from the same base. For example, they are able to spell the hard-to-hear schwa vowel in *opposition* by relating it to the base word *oppose*, and to remember the silent *c* in *muscle* by relating it to the derived form *muscular*, in which the *c* is pronounced. This knowledge also enables older students to read unfamiliar complex words and to grasp the meaning of these words when encountered in oral language.

Throughout each of these stages, children also acquire a sight vocabulary of words they recognize automatically in their reading and use readily in speaking and writing. Many of these high frequency words, such as *said*, *have*, *because* do not follow typical word patterns and often are learned by applying a variety of word-level strategies. For example, a sixth grader once told me he remembered the spelling of *because* by applying the mnemonic *Bears eat candy and usually swallow everything!*

In addition to basic word recognition and spelling, however, students need to have a deep understanding of word meaning. Rather than simply knowing the literal meaning of a new concept, it is important that students explore the multiple meanings of words, and how similar words differ from one another. The connotations of new words is also worthy of discussion, so that children understand the subtle differences in meaning between words such as *request* and *demand* or *cold* and *frigid*. These distinctions are particularly acute in content-area studies, in which new words are introduced with each topic studied. In science, for example, it is important for students to understand the differences between words such as *opaque*, *translucent*, and *transparent*, and to be able to read and spell long words such as *photosynthesis*.

Children come to school with wide variations in their levels of vocabulary. Biemiller (2004) found a 4,000 word difference in root vocabulary knowledge by the end of Grade 2 between children in the highest vocabulary quartile and those in the lowest quartile. He attributed these large differences to factors such as levels of parental language support and encouragement, other language sources (e.g. caregivers, day care, preschool etc.), and child constitutional differences in the ease of acquiring new words. A related finding is the gap in vocabulary knowledge between economically disadvantaged and economically advantaged children that begins in preschool and persists through the school years (Blachowicz et al., 2006). Since vocabulary knowledge is one of the best predictors of reading comprehension, these studies point to the need to address word study in classrooms at all grade levels.

Instruction that fosters the growth of word knowledge

There is a general consensus among researchers concerning instructional principles underlying effective word study. Rather than supporting rote learning and a reliance on a narrow range of instructional strategies, current research calls for instruction that meets the needs of the diverse learners in each classroom, and that encourages higher level thinking about language. Applying these principles in elementary classrooms is, however, challenging. These approaches rely upon teachers who have a deep knowledge base in language and who possess a range of instructional skills related to word study in reading, spelling, and vocabulary. Vocabulary instruction has not been given high priority in pre-service, in-service, or graduate courses until very recently (Manzo, Manzo, & Thomas, 2006). Templeton (2004) also points to a lack of adequate professional development in the area of spelling instruction. He maintains that teachers have not been

provided with the knowledge foundation or the type of instructional resources that support a well-grounded and systematic scope and sequence for spelling. Templeton also calls for the integration of spelling and vocabulary instruction, especially in the middle and later grades.

Vocabulary instruction is most effective when there are shared practices and a common philosophy among teachers in a school or school board based on a solid understanding of the knowledge base on vocabulary development and word learning (Blachowicz et al., 2006). These researchers emphasize the following characteristics of good vocabulary instruction:

1. *It takes place in a language and word-rich environment that fosters “word consciousness.”*

Tompkins and Blanchfield (2004) maintain that effective vocabulary instruction begins with a teacher’s excitement about words. This can also be said of the teaching of spelling and all aspects of word study. When the teacher displays a fascination with how “words work,” then students are more likely to share this enthusiasm. They also are given the important message that words are relevant throughout our lives and are not simply sterile elements on a page.

Teachers perform a valuable function when they model their own word-solving strategies with students in the form of think-alouds. This may take the form of learning the meaning of a new word they have read or heard spoken. It can also involve modelling strategies they use to spell a particularly difficult word.

A word-rich classroom environment will contain an abundance of resources for reading, speaking, and writing. Wide reading has been shown to be a major source of word learning (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998). Both fiction and non-fiction materials will be available in a variety of genres and text forms at an appropriate range of reading levels. Teachers can encourage wide reading through read-alouds, shared reading, and independent reading.

Technology will be integrated into each subject area so that words can be experienced through Internet websites, DVDs, CD-ROMS, podcasts, online dictionaries and thesauruses, books on tape, graphics programs, and so forth. Word play can be fostered through websites that provide word games; other sites can provide valuable information about word origins and new words in English.

2. *It includes intentional teaching of selected words, providing multiple types of information about each new word as well as opportunities for repeated exposure, use, and practice.*

Students should be actively engaged in learning the meanings of specific words. They should access their prior knowledge about the new concept, relate it to the meanings of other words they know, and apply it to realistic contexts. For example, the word *condo* could be explored on a number of levels. Students could begin by sharing what they know about condos. They are like apartments, but with a difference. Some students may live in a condo and be able to explain the difference. Structurally, *condo* is an abbreviation of *condominium*. When we look at the component parts, we see the prefix *con*, meaning *together with* or *jointly*, and the root word *dominium* (dominion) meaning *sovereign control*. Therefore, a *condominium* is a unit in a building in which all units are owned by the residents. Similar word analysis should take place when new terms are encountered in every subject area.

Biemiller (2004) argues that, although vocabulary levels diverge greatly during the primary years, virtually nothing effective is done about this in schools. Too often, words are not explored for their complex meanings, or are simply presented once. He advocates reading the same book multiple times, as in shared

reading, rather than several books once. Teachers should also call attention to key aspects of the new words instead of assuming children will learn the meanings merely through context (although context is an important strategy and is crucial in making words relevant).

The multiple relationships among words can be explored effectively through the use of graphic organizers. Word webs show how the key word is related to various other categories of words. Semantic feature analysis compares similar concepts by specifying a variety of features. Venn diagrams show the unique aspects and shared features of two or more terms. Computer software such as *Inspiration* and *Kidspiration* facilitate the classroom use of these graphic organizers.

These instructional strategies go far beyond the traditional approach to vocabulary acquisition, which often requires students to locate the word in the dictionary and use it in a sentence. The dictionary is still a valuable tool for word knowledge, but is seldom mined adequately for its valuable information. Students need to be taught dictionary skills such as the use of guide words, and should be shown the various components of a dictionary entry, which may include multiple meanings, word origins, sample sentences, pronunciation guides, and the spelling of inflected forms.

Just as Biemiller argues for a more systematic approach to vocabulary development, Templeton (2004) suggests a more theoretically and empirically grounded scope and sequence of spelling and vocabulary instruction than has traditionally been available to guide curriculum design and development. He recommends the developmental framework based on the work of Beers & Henderson, (1977), Read (1971), and Templeton (1983). Fortunately, the spelling and word study expectations and examples in the revised *Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8: Language* (2006) reflect this developmental continuum.

3. It includes teaching generative elements of words and word-learning strategies in ways that give students the ability to learn new words independently.

There are many approaches to choosing words to address for vocabulary instruction: content area terms; words encountered in reading and oral language; most frequently used words. The term *generative elements* refers to word parts that can be used to learn other words. These may include common roots, prefixes, and suffixes, as well as base words to which many affixes can be added. For example, the base word *phobia* can be combined with many other Latin and Greek roots. Knowing that *phobia* refers to an exaggerated fear facilitates an understanding of new forms such as *agoraphobia* (an abnormal fear of open spaces or public places). On a simpler level, when younger children are introduced to the concept of compound words, they can begin to see the logic inherent in many longer words (e.g. *sunlight*; *moonlight*; *lighthouse*).

There is also strong research support for encouraging students to select words they wish to study (Blachowicz et al., 2006). This vocabulary may relate to content-area words, vocabulary students need for writing, or words arising in literature and discussed in literature circles.

Teachers can capitalize on vocabulary instruction through read-alouds with students and shared reading activities. It is important to involve students in discussions during and after listening to a book. The teacher can scaffold this learning by asking questions, adding information, or prompting students to describe what they heard (Blachowicz et al., 2006).

These discussions can also facilitate the development of independent word-solving strategies in students. Being able to develop independent strategies for dealing with new words in all aspects of their lives is a vital skill for students. A range of strategies should be taught explicitly, and teachers should also

encourage students to reflect on the strategies they employ when reading or spelling an unfamiliar word. Unfortunately, research on the types of instruction that best facilitate independent strategies for word-learning is limited and inconclusive (Blachowicz et al., 2006).

Another key area for future research is the assessment of word knowledge. Standardized tests measure only limited facets of this complex area and often are unable to attend to subtleties of word meaning. Furthermore, teachers need to be able to determine needs of individual students in order to plan scaffolding support that is appropriate to the child's stage of development.

Conclusion

Reading comprehension is influenced significantly by a student's level of word knowledge, which includes vocabulary and spelling skills, as well as the ability to decode words in print. "Knowing words" involves understanding both the structure and meaning of words at various levels of complexity. Teachers can facilitate the growth of word knowledge through the explicit teaching of word patterns and word-solving strategies within the context of a word-rich classroom. The goal of instruction in reading, spelling, and vocabulary is to help students develop "word consciousness" and to become independent word-solvers in all subject areas.

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Discussion Paper #7

***Parent Engagement:
Creating a Shared World***

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Introduction

A metaphor of a “protectorate” has been used to describe the typical way in which schooling has been, and often continues to be, lived out (Pushor, 2001; Pushor & Murphy, in revision). Memmi (1965) puts forth the concept of a protectorate as a colonialist structure in which those with strength (the colonizers) take charge in order to protect those without strength (the colonized). Translating this concept in a school context, Pushor draws parallels. Educators, as holders of expert knowledge of teaching and learning, enter a community, claim the ground which is labeled ‘school,’ and design and enact policies, procedures, programs, schedules and routines for the children of the community. They often do this in isolation of parents and community members, using their “badge of difference” (p. 46), their professional education, knowledge and experience, as a rationale for their claimed position as decision-makers in the school. Educators assume this claimed position with the best of intentions – intentions to enhance student achievement and other educational outcomes, intentions to provide a safe and caring place for children, intentions to prepare children for their roles as citizens in a broader society. It is these good intentions that enable educators to act as protectors within the structure of a protectorate.

This scripted story of school is an historical one and is perpetuated by the complicitness of both educators and parents in how it is lived out. By accepting the taken-for-grantedness of their positions as protectors and protected in this structure, educators and parents reinforce, and are constrained and shaped by, the conditions imposed upon them. Yet, as they awaken to this taken-for-grantedness, they begin to imagine how to work against these constraints. Educators, recognizing the complexity of their mission and the challenges they face in realizing their intended student outcomes, seek ways to bring parents into this work. Parents, feeling marginalized by the professional boundaries drawn around the school, seek ways to establish a voice and a place for themselves on the school landscape.

Parent Involvement

Parent involvement is a common vehicle for bringing teachers and parents together in schools. Parent involvement programs “tend to be directed by the school and attempt to involve parents in school activities and/or teach parents specific skills and strategies for teaching and reinforcing school tasks at home” (Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez & Bloom, 1993, p. 85). Typically, parents are asked to serve in roles as “audience, spectators, fund raisers, aides and organizers” (McGilp & Michael, 1994, p. 2). Epstein’s well-known and comprehensive parent involvement framework (1995) reflects the roles McGilp and Michael identify as well as the parenting focus emphasized by Kellaghan et al. The six types of parental involvement she outlines in her framework include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. So, how does parent involvement change the scripted story of school – or does it? How does parent involvement move parents out of their position as “protected” – or does it?

Benson (1999) notes that [the word] “involvement comes from the Latin, ‘involvere,’ which means ‘to roll into’ and by extension implies wrapping up or enveloping parents somehow into the system” (p. 48). Beare (1993) adds that “the implication in the word is that the person ‘involved’ is co-opted, brought into the act by another party” (p. 207, as cited in Benson, 1999, p. 48). Parents who are “involved” serve the school’s agenda by doing the things educators ask or expect them to do – volunteering at school, parenting in positive ways, and supporting and assisting their children at home with their schoolwork – while knowledge, voice and decision-making continue to rest with the educators (Pushor, 2001). (Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005, p. 12)

With parent involvement, the scripted story of school as protectorate does not change. Because the school is still setting the agenda and determining what roles parents are to play within that agenda, the hierarchical structure of educators as experts, acting in the best interests of the less-knowing parents, is maintained. With parent involvement, the focus is placed on what parents can do to help the school realize its intentioned outcomes for children, not on what the parents’ hopes, dreams or intentions for their children may be or on what the school can do to help parents realize their personal or family agendas. The viewpoint seems to be one of “seek[ing] to determine what parents can do for teachers, rather than what schools can do for families” (Cairney & Munsie, 1992, p. 5).

Parent Engagement

Parent engagement, different from parent involvement, is an alternative way to bring teachers and parents together in schools, an alternative possibility for changing the scripted story of school.

“Engagement,” in comparison to involvement, comes from *en*, meaning “make,” and *gagē*, meaning “pledge” – to make a pledge (Harper, 2002), to make a moral commitment (Sykes, 1976, p. 343). The word engagement is further defined as “contact by fitting together; ... the meshing of gears” (Engagement). The implication is that the person ‘engaged’ is an integral and essential part of a process, brought into the act because of care and commitment. By extension, engagement implies enabling parents to take their place alongside educators in the schooling of their children, fitting together their knowledge of children, teaching and learning, with teachers’ knowledge. With parent engagement, possibilities are created for the structure of schooling to be flattened, power and authority to be shared by educators and parents, and the agenda being served to be mutually determined and mutually beneficial. (Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005, pp. 12-13)

In this changed script, there is no longer a protectorate, no longer a protector and a protected. No longer are educators entering a community to claim the ground of school. No longer are educators working alone to design and enact policies, procedures, programs, schedules and routines for the sole benefit of the children of the community. Instead, educators are entering a community to create with parents a shared world on the ground of school – a world in which “parent knowledge”⁶ and teacher knowledge both inform decision-making, the determination of agendas, and the intended outcomes of their efforts for children, families, the community and the school. Both educators and parents wear badges which mark their knowing and their expertise. There is a sense of reciprocity in their mutual engagement, a sense of benefit for families and the school.

Within the Literature

While Pushor and Ruitenberg (2005) make this clear distinction between *involvement* and *engagement* and use the terms very purposefully in their writing and research, other researchers use the terms interchangeably. While *involvement* continues to be the term predominantly used in the field, it is used to describe a wide-range of

⁶ Dr. Debbie Pushor is currently engaged in a three year narrative inquiry into “parent knowledge,” funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Her research is asking the questions, What is parent knowledge? How is parent knowledge held and used?

activities from communication with parents, to involvement, and at times to parental engagement in the core work of teaching and learning. It is often used as a term of comprehensive coverage which does not differentiate the type of relationship being lived out between educators and parents. The term *engagement*, while it is gaining in usage, appears still to be a less frequent descriptor. Constantino (2003) consciously adopts the word *engagement*, defining it as “the interaction between schools and families and the degree to which families are involved in the educational lives of their children” (p.5). Often though, *engagement*, like *involvement*, is used in general ways in the literature to describe activities which involve parents as well as engage them.

Further to this first differentiation, Constantino has chosen to use the word *family* in place of *parent* as “the word *family* helps to include all of those adults who play a significant role in rearing children” (p. 5). For similar reasons, Henderson and Mapp (2002) frequently use the term *family* in place of *parent*, although they use both. For Pushor and Ruitenberg, the terms are synonymous in representing primary caregivers who have responsibility and concern for children’s schooling experiences.

The result of these delineations – *involvement/engagement* and *parent/family* – is a body of literature with a multitude of sometimes undifferentiated terms: parent involvement, parent engagement, family involvement, family engagement. Determining the impact of parent engagement, in contrast to parent involvement, as a result, can be a muddy process.

What Has Been Substantiated

The body of literature on parent involvement/engagement is growing at a rapid rate. Web sites and links, online publications and yearly bibliographies abound. “There is more information on family involvement online than any one person can keep track of now” (Weiss et al, 2005, p. 1). New academic books and journal articles continue to appear. Topics in the field range from knowledge development to standards to tools to special initiatives, and cover parent involvement/engagement from preschool to secondary schooling. Annual syntheses of the research literature are being done by the National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), as are reviews and meta-analyses of research findings and implications (e.g. Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005; Jeynes, 2005) and evaluations of specific initiatives by researchers in the field (e.g. Redding et al, 2004).

The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children’s achievement in school and through life. ... [T]he research continues to grow and build an ever-strengthening case. When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more. (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 7)

Specific to academics, there has been a positive link made between parent involvement/engagement and the following indicators of student achievement: higher grades and test scores (on teacher ratings, achievement, and standardized tests), enrolment in higher level programs and advanced classes, greater promotion rates, higher successful completion of classes and earned credits, lower drop-out rates, higher on-time high school graduation rates, and a greater likelihood of movement into postsecondary education (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Fan & Chen, 1999; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005; Jeynes, 2005; Redding et al, 2004; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996).

In relation to other educational outcomes, parent involvement/engagement has been associated with a range of indicators of school success including: regular school attendance, better social skills, improved behavior, better adaptation to school, increased social capital, a greater sense of personal competence and efficacy for learning, greater engagement in school work, and a stronger belief in the importance of education (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005; Keith, 1999, as cited in Rous et al, 2003; Redding et al, 2004).

A critical finding that has come out of an analysis of the research is that...parental involvement enjoys an influence that largely transcends differences in SES, race, and other factors. This is supported in the parental involvement data for racial minorities and by gender, which is encouraging in that any group can experience the advantages of parent involvement. (Jeynes, 2005, pp. 259-260)

In a land as diverse as Canada, with a significant population of Aboriginal peoples and a vast representation of cultural groups, with rural and urban communities, with a multitude of family structures, and with a portion of our families living in poverty, this is a finding of note. It tells us that engaging families in schools has the potential to serve as one means of reducing the achievement gap between discrepant student populations.

Another significant finding comes out of the bodies of research literature on high-performing schools and effective schools. Of the nine characteristics delineated as common to high-performing schools, one of the characteristics is “high levels of community and parent involvement.” This finding is consistent with the research on effective schools, which cites “home-school relations” as one of the seven correlates necessary to make a school effective (Family Friendly Schools, n.d.). Lezotte (1991), in writing of a first and second generation of effective schools research, feels there has been a shift from schools giving parents “lip service” about their involvement to an understanding that an authentic partnership requires trust and communication between educators and parents as they work toward a common goal.

As is apparent, there is a real complexity to this field of research around parents, as there are multiple characteristics or correlates in play at any one time in a school, all influencing the levels of student achievement and the attainment of other educational outcomes. There is also a broad range of approaches to bringing the worlds of parents and the worlds of schools closer together – whether through involvement or engagement. Yet, within this complexity, research is making visible some particularities which will help to guide thinking and practice in schools. Henderson and Mapp (2002) conclude that “parent and community involvement that is linked to student learning has a greater effect on achievement than more general forms of involvement” (p. 38). In terms of Pushor’s and Ruitenberg’s delineations of *involvement* and *engagement*, it is parent engagement, then, that has a greater effect on achievement than more general forms of involvement. Jeynes’ (2005) meta-analysis supports this conclusion. He found it was not particular parent actions, such as attending school functions, establishing household rules, or checking student homework, which yielded the statistically significant effect sizes in the research in relation to student academic achievement. Instead, it was things which created “an educationally oriented ambiance” (p. 262) – an attitude or an atmosphere which formed for the child a sense of standards or support – which produced the strongest results. It seems that such an ambiance may be influenced more greatly by parental engagement in the core work of teaching and learning than by parental involvement in such activities as fundraising efforts or in support tasks such as photocopying.

In attending to “an educationally oriented ambiance,” it is important to look to what happens out of school, in the world of the home and community, as well as what happens in school. “What children achieve academically is the product not only of what they learn in school, but of a wide variety of factors, including home and neighborhood influences, and social and economic conditions” (Rothstein, 2005). Knowing this, “there is much more to attend to both within and outside of the boundaries of the school’s agenda of student achievement” (Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005, p. 14) – such things as the difference culturally appropriate programming makes to school attendance and participation, and to positive identity formation for both students and their parents; the influence of adult education classes on student engagement and retention and on parental success and well-being; the provision of easy and open access to computers, internet, newspapers and resources in enhancing both school and home literacies; and the provision of opportunity for voice, for

sharing “personal practical knowledge,” (Clandinin, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 1986, 1995; Connelly & Clandinin, 1985, 1988, 1999) for influencing decisions of personal, family, and community consequence in strengthening students’ and parents’ sense of personal power and autonomy. (Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005, pp. 14-15)

Attending to children, in the context of their families and communities, has much greater promise for educational achievement in the broadest of senses (and contexts). While it is important to engage parents on the school landscape, it is equally important for educators to move comfortably in the worlds of families and communities, off the school landscape. It is when these boundaries between school, home, and community become permeable and multidirectional that the creation of a shared world which supports and nurtures children is realized. As PamWoodsworth, Manager of KidsFirst in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, maintains, “It takes a child to raise a village” (personal communication, May 2006).

Practical Implications of the Research

The most significant implication of the research on parent involvement/engagement is that educators have to interrupt the scripted story of schools as protectorates and start looking inward at themselves – at what they do and why they do it. “Rarely has the education community stepped forward and pointed to itself and its inherent culture, as the possible nucleus of the problem” (Constantino, 2006). Instead of looking outward at families or communities as reasons for low parental engagement or unsatisfactory student outcomes, schools have a responsibility to look inward at their own assumptions and beliefs, and how these are lived out in their practices, as a starting place for changing the school landscape. “[T]his moving inward is often multiple, overlapping, and simultaneous: staff move inward as individuals, they move inward together as a school team, and they move inward as a broad school community” (Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005, p. 29). As individuals, they look at themselves, their attitudes, and where their own hearts are at in regard to the respect they have for parents and community members. As a school team, they look at their collectively-held beliefs. They ask themselves, “Why do we do what we do? What assumptions underlie our practices? Is there a match between what we say we believe and what we do?” (p. 30). As a broad school community, parents, community members, and educators work to create a shared vision which represents both parent and teacher knowledge, which articulates the hopes and dreams that together they hold for their children, and which establishes schooling as a collaborative endeavor.

Creating a counter-story to the story of protectorate requires a re-thinking of the concept of a welcoming school. Henderson & Mapp (2002) note that “families of all income and social levels are involved at home; but families with higher income and social class tend to be more involved at school” (p. 37). What does this say to educators about who sees themselves as welcome in the buildings and in the activities being lived out there – and who does not? What does this say about the social and cultural capital currently required by parents if they are to find a place for themselves on the school landscape? In creating a counter-story of hospitality, it is not about teachers and administrators who invite people to their place, but about creating a place that is owned as much by students, parents, and other community members as it is by staff and administrators.

Lambros Kamperidis (1990) writes that “only when we know how to behave as guests will we have the honor to acts as hosts” (pp. 10-11). More importantly, perhaps, teachers, teacher associates, administrators, and non-teaching staff members understand that they are not the owners of the school community. On the contrary: they, themselves, are guests. They have been received into a community with relationships, culture, and history that began long before they, as “school workers,” arrived at the school, and that will continue long after they leave. So ... “hospitality”... mean[s] the open door and outstretched hand extended by hosts who realize that they, themselves, are guests. (Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005, p. 37)

In practical terms, this could mean taking down the many signs which abound on a school landscape – staff parking only, no food or drinks in the auditorium, visitors please report to the office – signs which prohibit, admonish, or regulate; signs which send a message to parents and community members that they are, at best, inconvenient guests and, at worst, trespassers or interlopers. It could mean putting up new signs and displays with welcoming and culturally-representative messages, in the language(s) of the community. It could mean offering a parent a cup of coffee and a place to sit. It could mean being at the door or in the hallways to greet parents as they enter. It could mean taking time to talk with parents, to ask them to tell their stories, and to really listen. “Hospitality and invitation remain empty gestures until they are made with the genuine intention to open up the school space and agenda” (p. 43), to co-create it with parents and other caregivers as well as with students.

Creating a counter-story to the story of protectorate also requires the building of trust and relationships with parents and community members. This is a theme that is repeated over and over again in studies of parent

engagement. “Educators tend to believe that they have a level of efficacy to legislate the trust of families when in fact trust is an earned privilege” (Constantino, 2006). Trust is built only through consistent and intentional efforts to build quality relationships (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Solomon & Rhodes, 2001) – through time and contact.

In practical terms, this could mean just talking and just listening. It could mean asking parents to share what they know about their child, their family, their neighborhood. It could mean the sharing of selves, as human beings as well as parents or educators. It could mean getting to know the community well enough that the relationship-building is done contextually and situationally, not in general kinds of ways. It could mean establishing multiple connecting points for relationship-building – around children, and around the parents themselves. It could mean establishing multiple connecting places for relationship-building – in the school, in homes through home visits (Pushor & Murphy, 2004), or in significant community locations. While the gestures, in and of themselves, are informal and personal, there is a real sense of multiplicity to them. They are lived out with different people, in different ways, in different places, and at different times of day. Because of the trust and relationships they build, these gestures offer parents the possibility on the school landscape to share their knowledge and voice, to contribute and make decisions, and to exercise power and responsibility.

Living a story of parent engagement, then, means living out a new story of school. A world which is co-constructed and shared with parents and community members is a world with a side-by-side structure rather than a hierarchical one. What might that actually look like? In practical terms, it might mean that parents have a place in ‘staff’ meetings and professional development sessions. It might mean that aggregate information schools receive about student achievement from district or provincial exams is shared and discussed openly with parents and teachers together. It might mean that parents play an integral role in the development of a school’s continuous improvement plan. It might mean that educators ask parents how they want to be engaged in their children’s schooling, both in school and out of school. It might mean that opportunities to share knowledge and voice or to contribute to decision-making are not provided to only a select group of parents or the membership of the school community council but broadly to the parent body. It might mean that there are a vast array of possibilities for parent engagement within a school which meet the varying needs and interests of a diverse parent population. What is important in this new story is that parents have a place and voice in the core work of the school – that of teaching and learning.

A sense of reciprocity can not be overlooked. In this new story of schooling, it is important to attend to how parents and families, as well as children, can be strengthened through parents’ engagement in their children’s schooling. As this will differ for every community, and for individual parents within a community, there needs to be a real sense of particularity and contextuality to it. In some communities, it may be about supporting families in their development of cultural and political capital: creating opportunities for families to connect with one another, with school staff, and with community groups; helping families to prepare for and participate in meetings with local officials about needed resources or programs; working with families to develop action research skills to determine solutions to an issue in the neighborhood; inviting businesses to talk with families about their services and/or employment opportunities (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 64). In other communities, it may be about creating a sense of community or a feeling of homeplace for families who lead busy lives or spend much time away from their neighborhood: opening the school for community meetings and/or events; facilitating a neighborhood study or a photo/voice project; working with families to design a community-based service learning initiative. Acting in reciprocity is acting with responsiveness. Rather than with the mindset of charity, privilege or expert knowing, acting in reciprocity reflects a relational and caring engagement in initiatives deemed important by and for parents and families.

Creating a counter-story to the story of protectorate also requires a rethinking of teacher education – in preservice, inservice, and leadership education programs. Currently, in preservice teacher education programs

in colleges and universities, there is very little attention being paid to the development of teacher candidates' knowledge, skills, or attitudes around engaging parents in their children's schooling. While the topic may be touched on briefly in some courses, it is a topic which is largely absent in the 'curriculum' of teacher education. It is not any wonder then, that new teachers surveyed by the Metlife Foundation in 2005 "report that engaging and working with parents was their greatest challenge" (Constantino, 2005). Just as it is basically absent in preservice teacher education, parent engagement in children's schooling is an equally limited focus in inservice and leadership education programs. Given the strength and history of the scripted story of school as protectorate, purposeful, sustained, and intentional educational experiences which enable educators at all levels to rethink and reconceptualize the school landscape will be necessary.

Critical to all of the practical implications outlined for engaging parents is an allocation of time and money. Parent engagement will not happen in a school, a district, a province unless it becomes the focus of a concerted effort. Like any type of school or curricular reform initiative, it requires resources to support it.

Gaps in Knowledge/Future Research

While there is a wealth of research and literature that has come available on parent involvement/engagement in recent years, there are still areas of emphases in which we have limited knowledge. A first and obvious gap is in the limited amount of research and literature situated in a Canadian context. While the predominantly American literature in the field is of great benefit, it reflects a context quite different from Canada's. To use research and literature to inform the development of policy and practice in local and provincial jurisdictions in Canada, having research more closely reflective of the children, families, schools and communities of those jurisdictions may be more useful and informative.

A second significant gap is in the lack of research that examines parent engagement through the eyes of parents, rather than through the eyes of educators. So much of the research and literature that is available gives educators' accounts and perceptions of the school landscape, and of parents' positioning in relation to it. It tends to be research *on* parents, rather than research *with* parents. What might be learned if we heard parents' stories of their children's schooling experiences and their stories of their own experiences as parents in relation to the school landscape? What might become foregrounded from this research that is currently not being attended to in the literature or in the field?

If parents are to 'fit together' with teachers, and to be an integral part of the processes connected to teaching and learning, it is important to know what knowledge they bring to this relationship. This denotes a third gap in existing literature. While there is an extensive body of literature on teacher knowledge, there is no corresponding body of literature on parent knowledge. As a result, teachers are positioned in schools as knowing professionals while parents are positioned as unknowing, or less knowing, about children, teaching, and learning. In creating a research agenda around parent knowledge; in learning what parent knowledge is, how parents hold knowledge, and how they use that knowledge, new possibilities will emerge to position parents alongside teachers on school landscapes. How can what parents know, given that it is different from what teachers know, enhance schooling experiences for children? How can parent knowledge, used alongside teacher knowledge, inform decisions about school policies, procedures, and routines? How can parent knowledge, used alongside teacher knowledge, inform decisions about school programs? As developing a conceptualization of what parent knowledge is will begin to answer these questions, it is an important first stage in a program of research.

A fourth gap in knowledge surrounds the benefits of parent engagement for parents. When parents are engaged in their children's schooling, there is potential for reciprocal benefit for parents, families, and communities as well as children. There has not been research done which studies what these benefits might be, how they might occur, or how parents, families, and communities may be strengthened by them. From

an educational perspective alone, this knowledge could inform parent engagement practices, continuous improvement frameworks, and intersectoral initiatives.

A fifth gap links to research on the influences and conditions which affect student achievement yet which reside outside of the boundaries of the school's agenda. As schools have access to the majority of children and youth and, by extension, their families, the school system provides an opportunity for responding to urgent problems of child and youth poverty and social exclusion. Due to increasingly complex social factors, schools in their traditional ways are not able to address these challenges (Ungerleider & Burns, 2004; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2001). It will take a redefinition of the role of school within the community to help break patterns of poverty and social exclusion. How might the interdependent efforts of schools plus other human service departments such as health, justice, labor, social services, culture, and community services make a difference to students' academic success, engagement, and wellbeing, and to the wellbeing of families? This future research possibility may unpack how, indeed, it takes a child to raise a village.

Given the need for teacher education at preservice, inservice, and leadership levels, a sixth gap in knowledge relates to what areas of focus a 'curriculum' of parent engagement may be comprised of. Henderson & Mapp (2002) suggest there needs to be both preservice and inservice teacher education opportunities which focus on the advantages of school, family, and community connections, developing trusting relationships, sharing power with parents and community members, working with diverse families, and connecting with community resources (p. 65). Constantino (2006) argues that family engagement has to be looked at in the broader context of "systemic cultural change" if families truly are to be positioned as a meaningful component in their child's educational life. He believes, then, the information and education reaching educational leaders, specifically, must influence their actions toward systemic reform. From these two perspectives alone, it is obvious that in designing a curriculum of parent engagement for preservice teacher education programs, for inservice staff development foci, and for school system principal development programs or graduate education programs in leadership, there is much work to be done to determine what the components of these various curricula should be. In terms of future research, there is also the corresponding need, once the programs have been implemented, to evaluate the resulting outcomes in schools of these differentiated teacher education programs, in relation to impact on students, teachers, and parents.

Closing Thoughts

Beautiful people
You live in the same world as I do
But some how
I never noticed you before today
I'm ashamed to say. (Safka, 1967)

The story of school as a protectorate is a story that has outlived its time. The literature and research on parent engagement is broad enough and rich enough to provide a good plotline for a counter story – a story of a shared world in which educators and parents lay their knowledge alongside one another in schools to support and enhance the learning outcomes of children and to strengthen parents, families, and communities.

Beautiful people
You ride the same subway as I do
Every morning
That's got to tell you something
We've got so much in common
I go the same direction you do

So if you'll take care of me
 Then I'll take care of you.
 Beautiful people ... (Safka, 1967)

Parents' engagement in their children's learning makes a difference – to their children and to their children's achievement and success in a wide range of educational outcomes. It can make a difference to educators and to the landscape of schools as well ... a shared world.

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**RESPONSES TO DR. PUSHOR'S DISCUSSION PAPER
FROM SYMPOSIUM PANELISTS**

➤ **School Leaders' Role in Supporting Parent Engagement**

Margaret Roberts, Principal on Assignment, Employee Services
York Region District School Board

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to Dr. Pushor's paper, as well as to present thoughts from a school administrator's vantage point.

In reading Dr. Pushor's paper, as well as previous work she has published, it is evident that the power of story has guided her work. In our work as school leaders, stories also play an important role in pointing out needs and strengths in our work, and in the communities we serve. When I began my teaching career, parents of Kindergarten students stood on the sidewalk at the very boundaries of the school waiting for their children to be released from class. They rarely stepped onto the school property, let alone into the school. Flash forward a few decades, and Kindergarten parents are right in their children's classrooms, helping undo coats, and participating in field trips. This introduces the concept of parent involvement, but as Dr. Pushor reminds us, engagement is a much deeper concept. Joyce Epstein's model is a starting point, but we need to continue working to maximize the potential that parents have to offer.

Parent engagement is not about abdicating our power as educators or leaders, or about losing control of our schools. It is about strengthening our ability to identify and meet the needs of our students. In some schools and districts where great attention has been paid to improving instructional strategies so that students can succeed, performance plateaus have caused us to re-examine the areas in which we can make a difference. Just as we have spent considerable time empowering our staff and improving their practice through distributive leadership, it is now time for us to empower our parents (and the community), to contribute their talents and skills to the education of all our students.

This is a time-consuming process in the beginning, as we get to know the assets in our community and change the ways we do business. But it's exciting work as we build a common vision which will propel our work. Robert Hargrove writes about triple-loop learning, in which we reshape our ways of thinking, do different things (not just doing things differently), and examine our own self-perceptions so that we come to new ways of seeing ourselves and our purpose. We need to examine our own cultural proficiency so that we are able to advocate for others, and include them in our mutual work.

But how do we get to know our communities? Census data can be helpful, but doesn't present us with all the information we need. It's critical that we find ways of getting accurate and timely information, so that we can best design tailored programs that suit our students.

Formal processes and procedures at a school Board level are helpful, as they remind us to pay attention to parent engagement. We watch for the ways in which supervisors demonstrate their belief in the need for parent engagement, and the ways in which parents and school councils are included in the work done outside of our immediate schools. From system and school plans for continuous improvement, through administrators' evaluations, through to the work done by school boards' research departments, there are many ways in which commitment to parent engagement can be evident.

At the school level, it's critical that principals not work in a vacuum. We have to be asking at every opportunity, in every venue outside and in the school, "How are we doing in engaging you as parents?", and "What else can we do to engage you as a parent?"

In the grocery store, the hockey rink and libraries, we need to ask our public these questions, listen carefully to their answers, and be seen to respond to their input.

Opening up traditionally closed activities to parents will help break down some of the barriers to parent engagement. Parents can be invited to attend Professional Development activities and meetings, book studies and conferences.

We can meet parents formally outside the school, in mosques, Co-operative Housing centres, and workplaces. Personalizing invitations to engage in various activities, visiting homes to deliver school agenda books, holding breakfast meetings and using technology for interactive surveys are ways in which colleagues of mine have worked to expand the usual ways in which they communicate with parents, and engage them in the school's business.

There are many ways in which research can help us. First, because of the ever-increasing diversity in York Region, we need to know more about ways that we can engage and collaborate in culturally appropriate ways with our parents. Second, to continue our work in schools, increasing staff capacity, we need to know how to help teachers understand what is required in order to establish and maintain effective relationships with parents. Third, we need to know the best ways to engage in meaningful dialogue with the community, and in particular, with the most marginalized members of the community. Fourth, we need help identifying the barriers and obstacles between schools and communities. What tools can we use to do this? Fifth, we need to identify why some schools are able to engage the community effectively, and others are not. How can we learn from the successful schools? And lastly, what tools can we use to measure whether school staff are changing the way they see and engage the community?

Research work in these areas would be enormously helpful to us in our work as we focus on student success.

➤ **School Councils as a Vehicle for Enhancing Parent Engagement**

Gord Kerr, Parent Engagement Advisory Committee
Trustee, York Region District School Board

My thanks to the Research Panel for the invitation to be part of this session today. I am both honoured and very excited to be here today.

I first read Dr. Pushor's paper in December, and was immediately struck by a few of the key concepts contained in it:

The concept of the school system as a protectorate – Seymour Sarason talked about education being a contained social system – with a culture capable of defending itself from outsiders – but I quite like the term of protectorate;

The limited amount of Canadian research on this topic – something that I found as I began my own journey into this field of research;

The recognition of the need to prepare our new teachers to work well with parents.

But here's the other key thing that the paper gave me:

A renewed sense of optimism about the pathway that we are on here in Ontario to build parent engagement...

I believe that our school council system is one of the key stimulants for change – and a key vehicle for building broader parent engagement.

First – some context. I'd like to refer to Dr. Epstein's framework for a moment, as school councils represent only one of the six ways that parents and educators can collaborate for student success – but they bring a new set of voices and some diverse thinking inside the walls of the protectorate. And I believe that they attract the kinds of volunteers willing to take on a leadership role within their school communities.

I'll come back to Dr. Epstein's work again a little later – as I have re-purposed it to develop a leadership model for guiding the work of school councils – because councils are essentially action oriented – and need focus and direction to help and enable them take action to reach out to other parents.

Let me talk for a few moments about the foundation that we've built over the past 10 years:

A quick look at the past

Since the formation of councils in 1995, we've had parents and educators in regular dialogue, learning to working together, learning how to communicate with each other to get things done, and perhaps most importantly, making mistakes together.

It certainly hasn't all been smooth. There have been plenty of bumps along the way, plenty of conflicts, and quite a few wins too.

The bright side of all this is that through regular dialogue, interaction and even conflict, people learn about each other and learn how to work together.

And in many cases, both parents and educators have been finding out they have more in common than they may have thought, and finding out that by pooling their ideas and resources, they can achieve more by working together.

And in doing so, we've built a solid foundation.

Consider this second aspect of how far we've come over the past 10 years:

There have been many papers have been written about the essential role of the principal in leading councils. Today, people who were principals in 1995 now have almost 12 years of experience working with councils.

For those who have become principals since 1995, learning to work with councils has been part of the job since they began.

With a foundation of experienced principals leading the dialogue with and supporting the work of school councils, our platform for leveraging councils to engage other parents is very strong.

A look at the present

Now let me fast forward to today – what we have working in our schools right now – in this school year. With that foundation built and new support and direction to councils, we have entered a new phase of development for councils – councils that are capable of taking on a stronger leadership role within their school communities:

We have:

A new provincial policy on parent involvement

A new Parent Engagement Office

A base level of funding support to encourage school councils to reach out to other parents

Additional grant funding and a challenge to councils to engage other parents – through the reaching out grants

Let's consider the Reaching Out grants that brought 2800 applications from councils across the province – to help fund projects to reach out to other parents.

Not all of those projects will be home runs, but let's assume for a minute that half of those projects lead to productive outreach activities to engage parents in education.

That's 1400 projects that educators and non educators will work on together. That's 1400 opportunities to those people to learn more about how to work together - perhaps to experience some frustration - and to discover better ways to reach out to other parents - and new ways to work together.

Now, let's look another brief look at Dr. Epstein's framework for developing partnerships between families, schools and community.

It's more than a parent involvement framework – in fact, if Dr. Epstein were here today, she would emphatically tell us why she wants us to think beyond involvement and work towards partnerships. And by re-purposing it to fit our own context here in Ontario, and our own objective of engagement, it provides us with a strong strategic roadmap to help us along our journey.

For our councils, let's put the specific words aside – because people who are active on our school councils are not really interested in whether we want to call this involvement, engagement or partnerships – what they want is leadership and specific, tangible actionable ideas they can take to help our children, and to reach out to other parents. And as our councils become more familiar with what works and what doesn't, they will create new solutions to reach out to parents.

What Dr. Epstein's partnership framework provides is a way to guide people's effort – and councils need these kinds of focused strategies in order to succeed.

And so again, here's why I think that here in Ontario we have an enormous opportunity ahead of us. What we have sprinkled around the province within our 4800 schools are 4800 action teams – teams made up of both parents and educators – creating ways to reach out to parents in their communities.

What a brilliant concept – reaching out – in some cases for involvement, perhaps for engagement – but in all cases – parents and educators working together to reach out to other parents, and learning more and more about how to work together.

Imagine what we might be able to learn if we could capture some of the lessons from the various programs they create, recreate or improve.

And imagine too – if over the course of the next five years – we find a way to capture the best of what these teams of educators and parents learn together about what works and what doesn't. These won't be educator led solutions; they will be jointly developed solutions by teams of parents and educators.

Let's take a look at the future

In five years we will have:

Thousands of principals and parents with five years more experience working together to reach out to other parents.

Thousands of specific actions and programs will have been developed and tried – some that will work well, others that will fail miserably – and we have the opportunity to learn from both.

In five years here in Ontario – we will have over 15 years of focused dialogue between educators and parents behind us – because of our council system.

That's 15 years of slowing bringing new voices into the protectorate – or perhaps moving forward, ever so slowly to create that shared world that Dr. Pushor talks about.

Challenges and Research Directions

One of the key challenges that I believe that we face is this:

If we are to make real progress on this issue in the future, we are going to have to develop a validated method of measuring engagement.

What is our measure for engagement?

And what are the drivers of parent engagement?

There are two key reasons we need to develop a robust measure of engagement:

1. Without one, our councils will use the only measure they have readily available to them – counting the number of people they see at meetings and events – in other words – involvement – not engagement.
2. Without understanding the drivers of engagement, we will not be able to design interventions to advance engagement. All we will have is a theoretical concept – without the ability to make it actionable.

Here's an idea ...

I wonder if we might be able to borrow any concepts from the body of work done within the human resources field. I wonder if the body of work on employee engagement may contain some transferable concepts.

There are clearly elements that would not be transferable – as we are talking about a very different relationship than an employee employer one – however, the field of human resources has been exploring the shift from a **command and control oriented philosophy** to a **commitment oriented philosophy** for a number of years – where the primary measure is engagement.

Let me read to you some of the drivers of employee engagement from a **Towers Perrin** study of engagement on a global basis:

Emotional drivers

I care about the future of my organization
I am proud to tell others I work for my organization
My role provides me with a sense of personal accomplishment
I would recommend my organization to a friend as a good place to work
My organization inspires me to do my best

Rational drivers

I understand how I contribute to the success of my organization
I understand how my role is related to my organization's overall goals, objectives and direction
I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond what is normally expected to help my organization succeed
I am personally motivated to help my organization be successful

Obvious differences that highlight the nature of the employee employer relationship, but enough similarities there to perhaps leverage as a starting point to explore a measurement system for broader parent engagement with the education system.

Hewitt Associates are also doing work in this area, working with **Dr. Julian Barling** within the **Queen's School of Business**.

However we develop one, we need a measure of engagement, and we need to be able to understand what drives the engagement of parents – and teachers for that matter – in education.

And once we better understanding the drivers of engagement – we can develop new strategies and interventions to elevate engagement.

In the meantime, I will maintain that re-purposing Dr. Epstein’s strategies for stimulating family, school and community partnerships provides us with a viable approach for continuing to build bridges between parents and educators – and here’s why:

These strategies provide School Councils – school level teams of parents and educators – with strategic direction and tangible ways to reach out to parents.

Through continued dialogue, and by working together, these strategies will build bridges and stimulate the creation of new learning between parents and educators.

To sum up - here’s what I believe we have right now:

We have councils in almost every school – keeping the dialogue going.

We have educators and parents working together, and finding new ways to work together to reach out to other parents.

We have new support in place through the Parent Engagement Office to help our committed volunteers and educators invest in programs and new ways to reach out to parents.

We have 4800 teams of parents and educators working in perhaps the largest laboratory in Canada discovering new ways to reach out to parents – to involve them, to engage them – all in the name of student success.

My hope is that we will find ways to work together to capture and leverage some of the learning that is going on out there in the field – in our schools.

Additional Resources

For a PDF copy of the research paper entitled:

The Link Between School Councils and Rates of Participation in Various Types of Parental Involvement in Education

Please send a request by email to gord.kerr@yrdsb.edu.on.ca.

For web resources on Employee Engagement, please visit:

Hewitt Associates (English and French)

<http://was7.hewitt.com/bestemployers/canada/bestindex.htm>

Towers Perrin (English only)

http://www.towersperrin.com/tp/jsp/hrservices_html.jsp?webc=203/global/spotlight/spotlight_gws.htm

➤ **Considerations for the French-Language Education System**

Phyllis Dalley
University of Ottawa

Parent Involvement: a Francophone Perspective

In most Canadian provinces, entirely French-language schools owe their creation to the involvement of parents and members of the francophone community. So we have a history of parent involvement to build on. On the other hand, we must remember that not all francophone parents were in favour of opening these schools. This difference of opinion is becoming greater today because of immigration, migration, globalization, and the diversity of types of families. It can no longer be thought that the francophone community is of one mind about its educational goals. The inclusion of parents must be considered in terms of diversity in both language and identity.

While this diversity may exist in English-language schools, particularly in multi-ethnic and multilingual environments, francophone schools in areas where francophones are greatly in the minority draw their student bodies from very large geographical areas. It is evident that this reality increases the kinds of expectations and the schools' and parents' ideas about the role of the school. In an environment such as this, negotiation is even more complex because parents' knowledge is sometimes contradictory. Given our time restrictions, I will only present a partial picture of this diversity.

Data collected in three Canadian provinces suggest that all francophone or bilingual families want their children to become bilingual. But which bilingualism? And what about identity?

The position of the French-language school with regard to French is usually prescriptive; any deviation from the standard is to be corrected in the classroom, if not in social situations. Mastery of standard French is also considered to be evidence of a strongly constructed francophone identity. This position – *I am generalizing here so I do not go over my 5 minutes* – is in line with only some parents' expectations – in general, professionals working in French in an institutional environment, and some women who speak another type of French but who believe in the possibility that the school can provide social mobility. These parents define the bilingualism they want their children to have in terms of standard French and English, or dual unilingualism. Among the professionals are parents who attempt to get involved in instruction, or are critical of the quality of the language taught. Others follow the school's directions, that is, they accept the school's authority to teach as it sees fit.

We all know that the French language is not always transmitted in the home. We can mention two groups of parents here. The first sees the French-language school as a language school providing access to "real" French and rejects the legitimacy of the school's efforts to have students build identity. For the second, the process of choosing a school reawakens an attachment to the French language and their francophone community. Choosing a French-language school thus involves language and identity. But there is a difference in the hierarchy of expectations.

Some parents choose a French-language school for reasons that have more to do with identity than with academic work. These parents are often concerned that English has a lower priority in the school's concerns. For these parents, bilingualism means mastery of standard English and the ability to function in the kind of French spoken in the community, not mastery of standard French at any cost. For example, some question the idea that standard French is the language preferred in the workplace because their experience has been quite different. Parents' knowledge of this is rarely taken into account by the school, and the failure to consider this explains why parents choose an English-language or immersion school.

Other parents choose a French-language school to make sure their children will have continuity in their education, since they often speak little or no English when they arrive in a minority environment. Since their educational goals include French/English bilingualism, they can find themselves in conflict with the school's position on English being spoken at the school. These parents expect availability of English Second Language courses, leading to mastery within the school of the French language. We also see this point of view in parents in a more francophone environment, such as Northern New Brunswick – some parents going so far as to demand that certain subjects be taught in the language of the majority. It should be pointed out that this demand runs counter to the vision of the parents who worked hard to have a French-only school and this school's mission.

This same group includes parents who negatively judge the language spoken by the teaching staff and the students in the French-language school. Their standard French is not Canadian standard French – and what about the influence of English? Since their education has instilled in them a monolithic view of good French, and the idea that this language must always be spoken well, they express their desire to modify the educational standard. These parents want to establish a reciprocal relationship – their children will bring French to the school and the school will teach their children English – an exchange that seems logical and fair to them.

Faced with this diversity, what should the French-language school do with respect to having all parents be involved in children's education? While Pushor (2007) seems to indicate that this inclusion only involves sharing knowledge in order to achieve a common goal, it is clear that the socio-linguistic knowledge and identity of francophone parents lead to goals that are sometimes similar, sometimes contradictory.

What goals should be given priority by the school? Which language and which identity? Who will decide? Is it possible to reach consensus, even temporarily? The debate has just begun.

KEYNOTE PRESENTATION

Stan Shapson
Vice-President, Research & Innovation, York University



“Research Impacts on Policy and Practice: What are the stakes? What is achievable?”

Let me first thank the organizers of this Symposium for inviting me to participate. It is a delight to speak to this interesting audience. It reconnects me with fond memories of fascinating content and terrific people from my days as Dean of Education.

I wish to compliment the Ministry of Education on its visible commitment to research, for the appointment of a Chief Research Officer to provide leadership and for the strength of this Symposium program. Clearly, the Ministry of Education takes research seriously as a driver of innovation.

Many of you in this room, like myself, grapple with some significant aspect of research and its impacts on policy and practice. You understand the stakes involved; you wrestle with what is achievable. However, in this speech, I will take us beyond the context of the school system to consider the stakes for us as Canadians. I take this approach because Canada’s standing and quality of life are at stake.

My approach is two-pronged: (1) I address the plight of Canadian competitiveness in the global arena and (2) explore knowledge mobilization as one strategy for involving the education system, K-12 students and teachers, in assisting with our competitiveness.

Examples of Innovation

Recently, at MACworld, in San Francisco, Steve Jobs announced the introduction of the iPhone:

The iPhone combines three products — a revolutionary mobile phone, a widescreen iPod with touch controls, and a breakthrough Internet communications device with email, web browsing, maps, and searching — into one small and lightweight handheld device. It completely redefines what you can do on a mobile phone. Very different from the “Ma Bell” era in Canada!

In regard to such innovations, we are observing an interesting global phenomenon. Developing countries lack the infrastructure for land-based telephone wiring. They embrace the cascading breakthroughs in wireless phones, from the early cell to the Blackberry to the iPhone, thus leaping ahead of more than a century of western technology.

At York University, we partner with the medical devices sector, a multi-billion dollar sector, which uses IT solutions and medical research to produce stunning innovations. An example is an instrument called a cryocatheter or Freezor to treat cardiovascular disease. The instrument delivers a precise and safe application of cold energy temperatures, *as low as -80 degrees C* inside a beating heart, to neutralize heart tissue via a minimally invasive technique. The significance of Freezor, as with many medical device breakthroughs is that it provides an alternative to invasive surgical techniques, thus lowering costs for the system and risks for the patient.

When we think of innovations, it is often breakthroughs such as the iPhone and the Freezor that come to mind. But our approach to innovation must include more than simply technologies and products. After all, innovation is not only the introduction of a new idea into the marketplace in the form of a new product. It also should encompass an improvement in organization, process, or service, in other words, human performance. I will turn to the notion of social innovation in a few minutes.

Global Economic Competitiveness

The major effect of cumulative innovation on national performance is a huge concern for every country; therefore every country presses to upgrade its capacity for innovation. To a large extent, competitiveness determines quality of life. We can't stop the world and get off; we have to respond to this global challenge.

In Canada, we have depended for decades on our raw resources, and more recently our weak dollar, to buoy up the economy. We can no longer manufacture, nor transport, our raw resources competitively. We are challenged to engage in cutting-edge innovation, if we are to be globally productive and competitive. Just consider some information about our productivity. Remember we belong to the G7, the group of *seven* countries that claim to be the top economies in the world.

- In the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) productivity rankings we ranked 3rd in the 1960s. Today we rank 17th.
- For 2006-07 the World Economic Forum ranked Canada 16th. The indicators used for building the rankings include investment in education and training, the level of technological innovation, and infrastructure for scientific research.

As a nation we are losing ground. We have been displaced by a group of Asian economies and the Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Iceland in that order) Given that all the Nordic countries together have three-quarters of the population of Canada, it is telling that we trail each of them. If they have mastered the competitiveness challenge, why not Canada?

Without being alarmist, I want to be clear that we have an urgent challenge facing us that requires a national response. We have to recognize that the production of new knowledge and its innovative application is the currency of future competitiveness. Our major difficulty is that we approach innovation and productivity in a piecemeal, uncoordinated fashion, with too much emphasis on the short-term, that lessens the impact of whatever we do. We need to maximize our effort by mobilizing the key sectors of the economic and social systems to improve our productivity and competitiveness.

As educators, we have a major part to play in this movement: we need to focus more deliberately on intellectual capital, research and innovation.

All of us in this room are in the knowledge sector; each of us has to contribute to our competitiveness and innovation. And for us to be more successful, the base has to be clinched in K-12 classrooms.

In the early 1980's, Toshio Doko, a Japanese businessman, a leader in revitalizing Japanese manufacturing after World War II, said: "We have no natural resources, no military power. We have only one resource: the inventive capacity of our brains. It has no limits. We must make use of it. We must educate, train, equip. In the very near future, this mental power will become the most creative common good of all humanity." We

know that a national effort transformed the Japanese economy. In the World Economic Forum rankings for 2006-07, Japan, despite setbacks, ranks 7th.

What the Japanese discovered was a new natural resource – knowledge. As Canadians, we too have to nurture the enlargement of knowledge.

What then can researchers and educators do? We need to conduct research and mobilize those research findings that will help educators draw on effective practices, practices that improve the quality of the curriculum and learning experiences. In particular, we should

- renew our emphasis on science and technology excellence;
- enlarge our students knowledge of the role of social innovation;
- ensure that every student is exposed in the secondary school to the ideas and values of entrepreneurship;
- pay closer attention to assessment measures of our performance.
- assist our colleagues in turning to evidence-based policies and practices for support and direction.

Social Innovation

This leads us to the role of social innovation. An unbalanced emphasis on science and technology as the driver for improved quality of life is short-sighted. The best of science and technology is impelled by human curiosity, human intelligence, and human imagination. The best diffusion of the results of science and technology depends on carefully crafted social policy that, in turn, relies on social science research.

Let me make an explicit connection between our national competitiveness and social innovation. Both greatly benefit society. Although widely divergent, they do not operate in isolation from each other. Through a process of symbiosis, they must interact in close relationships to produce mutually beneficial results for the betterment of both our economy and our society. Competitiveness, fuelled by technological innovation and entrepreneurship, provides improved technologies for communications and information processing that enable greater capacity to conduct research, thus to further advance social innovation. Social innovation, often driven by the intent to enhance human performance, yields processes that improve our nation's competitiveness. For example, concepts such as social justice and quality of life subsume topics such as success for all students including our “aboriginal students”, “enlarging teachers’ repertoire of instructional practices,” and “supporting parent engagement” – key topics addressed in this Symposium’s program.

In my view, as it applies to education, social innovation draws on a broad and interlocking knowledge base and builds on creative talent and expertise to make a sustainable contribution to curriculum, teaching, and learning. Its *raison d’être* is change and improvement and its result better student learning.

Let me refer to three examples of putting research into action from York University:

A colleague in education who researches bilingual and biliterate abilities among linguistic minorities, has conducted ground-breaking research on practices that encourage inclusive community involvement in curriculum development and foster collegial environments to support teachers. She has widely and successfully disseminated her findings among diverse audiences of researchers, policy makers, and educators in several languages.

Another colleague, Debra Pepler, whose landmark research in bullying, is helping policy-makers and educators to curb aggression in schools, thus enhancing an educational environment that supports learning.

Through the dissemination and use of her research, she has contributed greatly to the treatment of childhood aggression, the most significant mental health problem identified by the Ontario Child Health Study.

Some of you will be familiar with Advanced Broadband Enhanced Learning, ABEL for short, at York. This program has been highly successful in supporting student learning through the blended use of IT. We conduct research and are finding that it is building teacher confidence in the use of IT in the classroom and better student enjoyment in the content, and new models of job-embedded professional development for teachers.

Background to Knowledge Mobilization

To advance social innovation, we need to focus on getting social research into the hands of users. Currently, we lack infrastructure to help us achieve this.

Over the years, science and technology have created and honed their infrastructure to facilitate tech transfer or the commercialization of research. This infrastructure includes policies regarding IP, tech transfer professionals, and brokers to connect researchers with lawyers and venture capitalists. At York, we are working on building a parallel infrastructure in the social sciences and humanities. We are calling this “knowledge mobilization”

Knowledge mobilization or KM is the active two-way exchange of information and expertise between researchers and practitioners resulting in the increased impact of social science and humanities research in decision-making, public policy, social programs and professional practices. This definition clearly highlights partnerships and collaboration, and seamless and sustainable interaction between university and community clusters.

Seriously committed to KM, York has been successful in winning the first national grant, shared with the University of Victoria, to establish the first KM offices in the country. This will help sustain our collaboration with other agencies as it building an institutional infrastructure which goes beyond individual researchers whose program of research or commitments may vary from year to year.

For example, we have fashioned a value-added partnership externally with the Human Service Planning Coalition in the Municipality of York Region, of which the York Region District School Board is a member.

In partnership with HSPC, we are currently researching a variety of social issues to impact quality of life and socio-economic development in this rapidly growing region. We are looking at immigration and settlement in the region and developing an indicators project whose long-term intention is the promotion of civic engagement.

The plan is long-term and ambitious; we want to ensure that leading-edge academic research is employed by policy-makers and community groups. In the same way, we want our researchers to understand the practical problems and issues faced by the region. It’s about two-way interaction. We plan to collaborate in a large-scale social innovation agenda that is multi-sector and grounded in research. We are also staking our commitment to working in cross-institutional partnerships, including K-12. I will return to this later.

Hurdling the Barriers

The gap that currently exists between the two cultures — the culture of the district and school, with its emphasis on effective practice and the culture of the university, with its emphasis on highly specialized knowledge – is difficult, but not impossible to bridge. It requires meeting space, both actual and virtual, for the exploration of issues and experiences and the identification of what is needed and what is available. It also

requires three functions – translation of research findings into practitioner language, brokering to assist in the actual transfer of knowledge, and mentoring to build capacity in both cultures.

Perhaps, the best way to visualize this meeting space is as a cluster of shared interests and services. We can imagine such a cluster whose membership comprises Ministry officials — representing policy, curriculum, and research — district professionals —representing administration, research and classroom — and university researchers —representing social sciences and education.

KM is a “contact sport”, characterized by local knowledge, informality, collaboration, and face-to-face communication. Its collective action draws on local assets and institutions. It is guided by the acknowledgement that everyone brings something of real value to the partnership and all need something of real value from the partnership. The brokers will understand how the local situation affects implementation. Both strategic and opportunistic, they will spot intersections that lead to new avenues for KM. It means working across our institutional silos.

One of the barriers to the adoption of new practices is a very human one. It is related to trust and risk. John Kenneth Galbraith, the Harvard economist from Ontario, wrote in an early memoir, *The Scotch*, about the farming community in which he was raised. He explored the attitudes of the farmers to change. The government had organized within the Department of Agriculture a group of itinerant consultants called agricultural representatives (ag reps), whose job was to assist farmers with the adoption of modern methods of farming. The farmers would have little to do with the ag rep “partly because he did not operate a farm himself. . . . It is because the farmers rightly sense that there is danger in the counsel of any man who does not himself have to live by the results.”

Apply this to the classroom teacher or policy-maker. Why should he or she listen to the outside consultant or researcher who assumes no risk in giving advice and does not have to live by the results, whereas the teacher or policy-maker may well pay a price in wasted effort, lost time, lack of results, or complaints from parents and politicians. Credibility is the crux of the relationship. Teachers and policy-makers cannot afford bum steers.

At the heart of the matter, if we want successful KM, we have to treat seriously the concerns of the user, by asking about relevance, efficacy, accessibility, alignment with current policy and political intentions, and its impact on learning and teaching. Does it lead to better learning for students?

The Implementation Challenge

Too often researchers and leaders dismiss the very idea of implementation. For some reason, they believe that this is the easy part; yet, we know that this is where the best plans regularly stall.

Will Rogers, the American humorist, used to tell the story when he was called to Washington for consultation with the Navy Department during the First World War. Submarines were causing great devastation to cargo ships crossing the Atlantic and the Navy was looking for a creative solution. Rogers listened attentively to the Admirals explain the naval problems faced by the US Navy and the high cost of submarine warfare.

He offered a solution: “What I would do is drain the Atlantic Ocean, let the subs drop to the floor of the Ocean where they are helpless, and then bomb them.” The Admirals protested, “But how are we going to do that?”

Airily, Rogers replied, “I am an ideas man. Let’s leave the details to the implementers!”

Let's not! If we wish success, let us be sure to challenge the implementers to use their best knowledge and experience. Using evidence-based implementation processes, the partners within the cluster will share the risk and work collaboratively to resolve issues as they arise. Committed to a more competitive Canada, we will break out of our neatly defined silos and work across disciplines, professions, and institutions, in partnership.

If we seriously wish to have KM work we have to apply intelligence and creativity to designing implementation protocols, again, evidence-based, to support KM.

- Leadership at the district and school level to model the importance of evidence-based practice;
- Mediators to guide the implementers through the research and into practice;
- Willingness to move forward on a broken front so that the leading edge of practitioners are not held back waiting for everyone to get on board;
- Giving teachers the licence to take risks;
- Working in partnership to resolve problems and share the risk;
- The use of teacher research to test out the practices in actual classrooms and to report their findings, thus encouraging participation and involvement; and
- Serious assessment of KM, both the process and the implementation.

Summary

Canada is complacent: we have not yet sensed the urgency of global competitiveness, nor the dangers of retail politics. We must blaze a new path ahead as an educational community. We must re-focus our institutions on a larger national goal – our global economic competitiveness. Cluster-thinking will promote an innovation agenda. Drawn together by a vision that transcends narrow institutional interests and advances the knowledge society, we can form a solid base for our future. Through a commitment to excellence in education, we can educate a generation of K-12 students working for a competitive Canada. We can affirm Canada's leadership in producing new knowledge and in putting it to work in the community.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Following is a top-line summary of the breakout discussions at the 2007 Symposium, provided by Ontario Education Research Panel co-chairs Doris McWhorter and Mario Lajoie.

ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

- This is not the time for more research but a time for action – sense of urgency
- Partnerships
 - Acknowledge what we don't know
 - Invite participation
 - Share best practices @ university, Ministry, boards, schools
- Action informed by research
 - Improved teacher training/education
 - Building self esteem, self-confidence
 - How do aboriginal students experience the transition from elementary to secondary school, and then to post-secondary destinations?
- Teachers/principals as leaders NOW



SPECIAL EDUCATION

- Facilitate and share research with education partners and stakeholders (e.g. research clearinghouse)
- Identify Canadian norms for screening and identification processes
- Identify Canadian resources/instruments for teachers to facilitate early identification and intervention
- Implementation of effective practices for engaging parents and communities

DISCIPLINARY CHALLENGES

- Foster partnership & relationships (Ministry, boards, schools, agencies, researchers)
- Evidence-based research

- Data collection, research, evaluation
- Effective techniques, alternative approaches

- Provide more support in school
 - Capacity building and in-house training for school staff

- Facilitate and share research with education partners and stakeholders (e.g. research clearinghouse)

- Consolidate research on factors related to discipline issues, effective responses

- Learn from small boards about models for working effectively with community agencies

- Encourage consistent policy and practices between education, social services and justice

- Impact of school climate on discipline

- Impact of classroom management on discipline

TRANSITIONS

- Research into factors in positive transitions
 - Retention in francophone system
 - Incorporate the student/parent voice in research
 - Longitudinal, tracking studies: follow students over time to identify factors that support successful transitions

- Identify effective cross-panel transition strategies (shared teaching, info. sharing)

- Increased collaboration – universities/boards

READING COMPREHENSION

- Develop reading assessment measures across different kinds of reading, subject areas, contexts
- Identify comprehension strategies that work and disseminate to teachers in a variety of usable ways
- Ongoing professional development, e.g. how to support literacy in all subject areas
- Identify effective strategies where language of schooling is not the same as language at home
- Potential Research Topics: Reading (some examples)
 - Relevance/rationales for textbook selection/use
 - Impact of information technology on comprehension
 - Students' reading preferences
 - Multiple levels of comprehension
 - Early intervention strategies
 - Effective parents partnerships

PARENT ENGAGEMENT

- Move from the protectorate to engagement, reciprocity
- Clarify involvement vs. engagement
- More (Canadian) research:
 - Valid measures of engagement
 - How to reach out to the families we don't see
 - Parent to parent engagement
 - Meaningful dialogue/relationships across language, cultural, socio-economic diversity
 - Progress over time
- More research required in this area (in contrast to closing the gap for aboriginal students, where action is the priority)
- Time appears to be right – clear opportunities for further research, collaboration, partnerships

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APPENDIX B – WORKING SESSION NOTES

WORKING SESSION ‘A’

SUPPORTING ABORIGINAL STUDENTS’ SUCCESS

1. What are the implications for practice resulting from the presenter’s findings?

- Is there any research or action that can move the attitude of teachers so that all teachers believe that each and every student can succeed? Perhaps, our studies of Aboriginal culture and minorities are too focused on the Aboriginal community and minorities themselves and are not paying enough attention to the teachers and the education system.
- If we want to change the attitude of teachers, we should look for a way we can do this while building upon the Ministry programs and policies for teachers for educating teachers that are already in place.
- Over the last several years, teachers have not been fully involved in putting character education practices into practice. The holistic concepts discussed in Dr. Toulouse’s presentation can be considered as part of the new character education initiative.
- There is a lack of knowledge about Aboriginal communities in Canada. Many teachers assume that Aboriginal students attend federal schools and thus they become an invisible group in the classrooms of publicly funded schools. Not only are we not recognizing Aboriginal students, but there is a great deal of knowledge that teachers need in order to better understand Aboriginal students. Furthermore, with teachers overwhelmed by the fact they feel they should know about every community, it is also important for teachers to understand that they have to admit in some cases that they lack knowledge about specific cultures.
- University of Windsor has started a program that is focussed on increasing the knowledge teacher candidates have with regards to First Nations culture and Aboriginal students. The importance and success of this class is apparent.
- We need to build communication and dialogue about identity and cultures. In diverse cities and boards, this dialogue must begin with teachers thinking about and opening a dialogue about their own identity. Once teachers understand their own identity they are better prepared to work with students who have different identities within the classroom.
- The historical reality is that our society has been shaped by colonialism. As part of this colonial hangover, we have seen some groups pushed to the edges of today’s society. Yet despite the fact that there is clearly insufficient knowledge and recognition for some of these groups, it is amazing how little time we spend educating educators before they enter our schools. The eight months of training is not enough to engage educators. Furthermore, in most cases, these programs do not include a required class in Aboriginal education. To support the Aboriginal education in publicly funded schools, there is a need for more Aboriginal educators and more educators who can define their own epistemology. There is a need for action now, as Aboriginal children are being lost to suicide. If tinkering around the edges of policy is not enough, then perhaps we must consider dramatic action that involves making changes to Bachelor’s of Education programs.

- Teachers need to get used to using the words: “I don’t know.” Teachers do not need to have all the answers; it is an act of humility to admit when you don’t rather than pretending like you do. Part of the colonial hangover is blaming, shaming and producing fear, but this does not have to be the case. A book that increases understanding of Aboriginal culture should not just be a book about Aboriginal culture, but it should be a great book that is shared in its own right. When you are educating students that are coming from a different place, you need to unpack yourself in order to better understand the students. Your actions should not come from blame, shame and fear.
- Humility – very aware of little knowledge that we have around aboriginal issues and we are learning from colleagues and communities
- We need to ask the people who know (i.e., from the Aboriginal community) the schools to help us understand better
- Holistic education – issue of “outcomes” focus vis a vis relationships. How do we integrate holistic curriculum? What is a common definition of student success? Conversation needs to include “holistic” sense of success for aboriginal students
- Need to increase knowledge in the school system of Aboriginal culture. We need more Aboriginal teachers and need to involve Aboriginal community
- Aboriginal learning through the “spirit”. Need to remember the spiritual dimension
- Research/literature reviews into what curriculum re: Aboriginals is available is good, but teachers/administrators need to be “connected” to find out where it is available
- Ontario curriculum is continuing to being revised to include Aboriginal perspectives info in all grades, but need to have “local” flavour which will assist in building communities (safe/welcoming school environment)
- Need to make connections in community with Aboriginal parents, authors (come in to read at literacy time) and role models from the community
- In order for our Aboriginal students to succeed we need to make a commitment to this issue. We need to think about think deeper. We need to think of things such as how our buildings look, how things are structured and recognize what are the barriers to welcoming Aboriginal students.
- From a teacher development perspective – there are very few aboriginal teacher candidates so how do we help them understand the two world perspective? The aboriginal students need to adapt and have two feet in two worlds. Also, how do we facilitate non-aboriginal students to understand aboriginal culture?
- In the ‘60’s the Hawthorne report recommended that teachers need to learn about aboriginal culture, language and context. Aboriginal history has been deliberately kept from public and now people understand that we need to commit. A 2002 study from race relations – Learning to Walk in Beauty – students did not have a good understanding of the history and culture. There is a ¼ course for pre-service teachers, which is not enough.

2. What additional research questions arise from the findings?

- Some evidence seems to suggest that schools that are attended by only Aboriginal students produce favourable outcomes. Perhaps more research is necessary to determine what models are and are not working.
- Using tools such as statistical neighbours to remove socio-economic factors to determine what factors are correlated with performance.
- Re: Is what we are doing appropriate? Quality of the curriculum? Quality of the implementation? Effective?
- How do we effectively mobilize Aboriginal knowledge to be part of this?
- How do we ensure student success? Self-identification issue important in being able to ensure success.
- Beliefs are important – i.e., do we believe all students can be successful?
- Need to create an immersion situation for pre-service teachers so that when aboriginal students come to school they are part of the community. This would be a useful study.
- As Canadians we are not encouraged to talk about our culture. There needs to be reflection at one point or another about ones cultural roots.
- On the international scene, how Canada deals with aboriginal students will hold large weight. Maybe the time has come to look at the 7 teachings.
- The first thing to work on is self-esteem. Not aware of studies on this specifically with aboriginal students. Perhaps some action research on this topic.
- We know that community is important so are there ways we need to connect further in post secondary education programs. Possibility of post secondary Aboriginal studies.
- What are the aspirations for aboriginal children within their own community? We need to recognize their dreams by bringing their community to the table?
- There are not many aboriginal academics and this needs to be nurtured. If not aboriginal, they should be doing it in partnership with First Nations community and organizations.

3. What are 2 or 3 next steps that schools, boards, public policy makers and/or researchers could pursue to make advances in this area?

- Principals need to be encouraged to build communities and help teachers stay passionate about their work.
- Technical analysis of the curriculum is required to ensure that units related to Aboriginal culture build understanding of Aboriginal culture rather than perpetuating stereotypes and misconceptions.

- Action must overcome jurisdictional factors to make sure teachers are put in the classroom now. Cites the example of a program that would train 200 teachers in 24 communities, which requires a \$20 million investment over 10 years, but has been held up by overlapping jurisdictions.
- Explore options for blending research on English Language Development programs with research related to Aboriginal education.
- Include study of Aboriginals as part of the teacher education curriculum.
- Cover the science base of Aboriginal culture when teaching about Aboriginal culture.
- Connection required between today's discussion and Ontario's Education Research Strategy and OERP
- Methodological approach re carrying out research – is there one that support's Aboriginal world view? What if research is done through lenses of the 7 ways (values/principles)? There is need for a balanced/holistic approach
- Need to share success stories. What is working? Best practices and locating existing curriculum resources.
- Need to identify Aboriginal community's high level of complexity and demographics (i.e., not just on and off reserve categories) ...dialects within a community
- Increase partnerships between Aboriginal communities and organizations, school boards and Ministry etc.
- Aboriginal education for all - not just for Aboriginal students
- Learn from other jurisdictions (e.g., Sask., BC – others?) Need a forum for this.
- We have talked about several themes summarized as:
 - The need to work with students
 - The need to recognize the aboriginal self esteem issue
 - The need to focus on Teacher education
 - The need to look at the Curriculum – gap analysis
 - The need to nurture / catch up and get aboriginals into the education system
 - The need to look at transitions and understand the elder vision of community

Viable Next Steps

- Partnerships - developing formal and informal re sharing effective practices and available info ; need to involve parents, families, and communities at school level
- Implementation of Ministry's First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework will set out roles/responsibilities/expectation of ministry, school boards, and schools/classroom/communities
- Strong support from the Ministry to implement student learning strategies, support student engagement, learning, support to teachers who are struggling (need for differentiated instruction) and education for all

- Support for research activities to measure/evaluate how we are doing. Is anything changing? Need to recognize where effective practices are happening

CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS

1. What are the implications for practice resulting from the presenter's findings?

- Early screening, assessment and monitoring of all students and the role of classroom teachers requires greater focus and support in Ontario's publicly-funded elementary schools
- Effective intervention for vulnerable students should occur at an early age and a variety of instructional strategies are required as targeted and universal interventions
- There is a need to build teacher capacity in working with data and evidence to inform early intervention classroom practices for diverse English and French-language school communities
- Mapping Socio-Economic Status (SES) and school learning with social emotional factors by area is a powerful tool for schools and their communities in helping to address the needs of students at risk in literacy and numeracy
- The role of the Early Development Instrument (EDI) and the Early Screening and Intervention Tool used with pre-school and school age children need to be determined and implications for teacher practice need to be identified
- There is a need to identify additional effective tools, practices, and research findings to support early years teachers in working with all students, and particularly students at risk
- The eight instructional principles for improving literacy and numeracy in children with special education needs identified in the article need to be flushed out with concrete descriptions, used in action research and results shared in professional learning communities

2. What additional research questions arise from the findings?

- How does differentiated instruction, collaborative-learning and other effective instructional strategies improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for students with special education needs?
- What instructional strategies support improving the learning outcomes of aboriginal students with special education needs?
- What effective strategies build character development and learning outcomes for students with special education needs?
- What are the models of school leadership that support inclusive education?

- What is the knowledge that JK – 3 teachers have and how do they use it to improve the learning outcomes of their students?
- 3. What are 2 or 3 next steps that schools, boards, public policy makers and/or researchers could pursue to make advances in this area?**

Most Viable Next Steps:

- Identify the needs of teachers – i.e., the tools and competencies that teachers need in order to ensure effective research supported interventions for students with special education needs are in place that link curriculum, instruction, and outcomes (including the link to EQAO assessments)
- Explore how the teacher mentoring programme can support some of the professional learning needs of teachers working with students with special education needs
- Ensure that early years teachers have formal and informal leadership and support in effective practices and research at the local and school board level (i.e., establishing communication networks for research sources and supports for professional learning communities)
- Improve the identification of research priorities and the process of sharing school board research more widely (i.e., action research, practitioners focused research, effective and collaborative partnerships)

Other Next Steps:

- Identify effective strategies, information and data to improve communications with parents and communities to sustain engagement in student learning over time
- Clarify and improve procedural processes to ensure that public education is a community partner that focuses on students as opposed to operational efficiency
- To help school boards see themselves as a service business (i.e., long term – with research and effective applications for all students)
- Collect and document information to demonstrate what teacher practices are being implemented, how they are leading to improvements in student achievement and provide a seamless process to share this information
- Ensure that principals have formal and informal leadership and support for working with diverse students communities (i.e., students with special education needs) through the Ministry, school boards, and their associations – OPC, CPCO, AFDO
- Adjust early childhood education and teacher education programmes (i.e., the need to include pedagogy for improving literacy and numeracy for all students and more specifically for students with special education needs; the allocation of components in the teacher education programme – i.e., 36 hours for literacy in pre-service and the implications for what and how it is taught) and the need for a continuing education component through teacher in-service

DISCIPLINARY CHALLENGES

1. What are the implications for practice resulting from the presenter's findings?

- Early Identification and Intervention are critical.
- Assessment and Intervention for students with discipline problems must consider both behavioural and academic challenges and address both, as needed (behavioural label is an issue if other problems are not recognized; special education policies focus on one disability – the primary disability).
- A need for assessment tools to be translated in French.
- Pilot programs to address and deal with co morbidity issues.
- Principals and Teachers training, in a variety of approaches, beyond classroom management (includes foundation knowledge in mental health, group processes, engagement, character education, effective intervention strategies).
- School-wide efforts to foster socio-emotional learning and create a positive climate (relationship building) are need in all schools to create a safe and caring environment (shared responsibility – involves parents, caregivers, families, stakeholders, and communities).
- Knowledge Management is important (collective responsibility).
- Importance of extracurricular activities.
- Alternatives to suspensions such as restitution or restorative practices should be considered.
- Infrastructure and supports in schools are critical to success (e.g., doctors, social workers, child development counsellors, psychologists, capacity building, resources, training, etc.).
- Models/Pilots for year round schools.
- Evidence-based research (e.g., action research, data collection, research, evaluation, effective techniques, alternative approaches).

2. What additional research questions arise from the findings

- What assessment methods would best identify co-occurring disorders?
- What delivery methods would best support students with co-occurring disorders?
- What are the Canadian norms for screening and identification processes?
- What resources/assessments do teachers need to facilitate early identification and intervention?
- What competencies, skills, knowledge, and attitudes do teachers need to address disciplinary challenges?
- How effective are initiatives that focused on teacher training (pre-service/in-service) in areas such as mental health, group processes, engagement, character education, and effective intervention strategies?

- How can we give principals/teachers the skills and supports needed to individualize support while attending to the needs of a broad range of students?
 - How effective are school wide efforts to foster socio-emotional learning to create a positive climate?
 - What forms of school organizations work best to support students who are experiencing academic and discipline problems?
 - What are the differences in disciplinary challenges for teachers and students in elementary and in high school?
 - How can schools become more inclusive in addressing the needs of students with emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD)?
 - What is the impact of gender, race and ethnicity at a systemic level (heterogeneity)?
 - How do we influence politicians of the importance of disciplinary challenges?
 - What effective practices exist for engaging parents and communities?
 - What are the priorities and what can we do differently?
- 3. What are 2 or 3 next steps that schools, boards, public policy makers and/or researchers could pursue to make advances in this area?**
- Foster Partnership and relationships (Ministry, school boards, schools, community agencies, and research community – “PREV NET” – goals is to link schools with community partner).
 - Evidence-Based Research (data collection, research, evaluation, effective techniques, alternative approaches).
 - Provide more support in schools (individualized supports, capacity building, and in house training for school staff).

Other Steps:

- Support action research (determine what works and what does not).
- Build leadership capacity in schools.
- Provide mentoring and individualized supports for students who are at risk.
- Support longitudinal studies/research.
- Re-examine policies (e.g., code of conduct, suspension/expulsion) and develop inclusive and alternatives policies.
- Focus on sustainability of initiatives.

- Provide supports for parents on how to deal with children with serious discipline issues, socio-behavioural disorders.
- Cultivate a culture of engagement and caring – creative pedagogical practices.
- Develop a critical consciousness – focus on school culture.
- Distinguish between students who have serious mental health difficulties and students who need additional help/support – different strategies are required for different students.
- Link supports/initiatives for students with disciplinary challenges to EQAO results.
- Conduct more research on classroom management.
- Provide training and evaluation on new disciplinary practices (e.g., restitution and restorative practices).
- Develop and create a holistic approach.
- Make “IT” a priority.

TRANSITIONS FROM ELEMENTARY TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

1. What are the implications for practice resulting from the presenter’s findings?

Responses can be grouped under the following four areas:

- Definitions
- Identity/Culture
- Realities/Developmental Issues
- Ideas/Solutions/Practices

Definitions

Transitions

There are different kinds of transition points and processes that can exist for students. For example, junior to middle school (Grade 6 to Grade 7), middle school to secondary school (Grade 8 to Grade 9). These examples might or might not involve a physical transition between school buildings, i.e. a school can house Grades 7 to 12. Students also begin to feel the transition from secondary to post-secondary in Grade 10.

Perhaps we need to conceptualize transition differently and pay attention to the language and metaphors we use to understand transitions, e.g. elementary schools as ‘feeder’ schools. What would it mean if we re-conceptualized transitions to consider the role of relationships? For example, if a family of schools were about relationships between peers, parents, students, and teachers then perhaps classroom practice might change.

Students At-risk

There is a need to broaden the perspective of the definition of students 'at-risk' in order to include students that are struggling in different ways. For example, high achieving students can be at-risk if they are experiencing intense pressure to succeed. A definition should consider that all risks might not be equal.

Identity/Culture

There are differences between the school's formal culture, the teaching culture, and the student culture. The sub-populations of students who are at-risk are underrepresented in the school's culture which could be the result of the generalization of information on these students. There needs to be more effort from the school's culture to 'cross-over' and understand the identity formation, experiences and language of students. Teachers need to have the knowledge and opportunity to de-construct their experiences with students. The faculties of education can play a role in ensuring faculty members and teacher candidates have a greater understanding of themselves and the teacher-student relationship.

Humour plays an important part in the culture of 13 and 14 year-old-students, much like some aboriginal cultures. The use of humour could be considered as a marker of successful transition from elementary to secondary environments. Grade 9 students gain power through humour as they criticize and make fun of new situations with which they are getting comfortable. Teacher and school cultures would need to make room for understanding the ways students use humour that if misinterpreted could be considered a 'bad transition' or behaviour issue.

The integration of recently arrived immigrants into Canadian and Franco-Ontarian culture is changing French language schools. Students and their families are in survival mode and therefore schools and communities need to work together to ease the impact for these students.

Realities/Developmental Issues

Adolescents are ready to separate from their parents and yet during transition time is when they need their parents the most. We need to pay attention to this developmental reality.

For remote, rural and/or French language schools and boards accessing and relating with parents is difficult given the large distances between home and school.

The elementary, intermediate and secondary panels have different assessment, evaluation and reporting practices that might not be conducive to successful transitions. Also, secondary schools who are receiving students from border reserve schools using the American curriculum have difficulty assessing these students according to the Ontario curriculum.

For French language schools the problem is retention and why francophone students leave. Realities such as limited university options and the replacement of francophone students in elementary school by newly arrived students to Canada contribute to the retention problem.

Sharing and accessing data between schools and researchers for the purposes of longitudinal studies is very difficult. Even for elementary and secondary principals within the same board there are many artificial barriers to accessing data on students moving between the two panels.

There is tension within the areas of research concerning what constitutes solid empirical work. Studies on transition need to expand upon quantitative methods and incorporate qualitative research to measure such

factors as self-esteem, belonging, and the social and environmental contexts. A mixed methods design that includes quantitative and qualitative research each with different purposes and outcomes will better capture the complex variables associated with studying transitions. A critical ethnography is needed of students who are dropping out in Grades 7-9; their schooling experiences need to be understood, their voices need to be heard.

Dissemination of research findings to board, school and classroom levels is very important in order to effect change. There are size and inequity issues in terms of distribution and it is important for practitioners to access the information at all levels. But it is not just a matter of pushing the information out or mobilizing and exchanging information it is about creating a culture of inquiry as well. Most academics want their research to be shared but often information sharing is not part of the finding/grant agreements.

Ideas/Solutions/Practices

- Transitional Learning Coaches – piloted in a York Region DSB secondary school drop-in centre. Two teachers walked around the halls to seek out marginalized students, socially isolated students, and worked on building their social skills and social connections.
- A mentoring system in a 7-12 school that pairs up the older students with the younger ones during lunch time and school yard time. The older students receive community hours for their time.
- OAPCE, an organization for francophone parents publicizes good practices being implemented in schools and boards.
- More dialogue and collaboration between elementary and secondary teaching communities is needed. E.g. Bridging units – Grade 8 teachers and Grade 9 teachers develop curriculum together so that the ending strand in Grade 8 is the beginning strand in Grade 9 with some overlap.
- Using EQAO data, longitudinal tracking of achievement data of Grade 6 students and Grade 10 OSSLT results.
- Sharing of best practices should be based on longitudinal evidence, i.e. small studies, practitioner/action research, and include teachers and students in the analysis.
- Coordination and partnering between school boards and universities is a good way to have research direct classroom practice.
- MISA is providing the opportunities for schools and boards to put into place the structures and practices that promote research and the sharing of data between schools and boards.

2. What additional research questions arise from the findings?

Transitions

- What is transitions? Who defines transitions and how is it contextualized?
- Are the fears regarding the integration of Grades 7 and 8 conclusive?
- What is the effectiveness of having fewer transitions in Grade 7 to 12 schools?
- What is the research on the transition of girls and boys from gender specific schools?
- What impact does the integration of newly arrived students to the Franco-Ontarian culture have on retention of students during the transition years?
- Are there models of welcome/orientation activities that work better than others?
- What works and doesn't work with students? What individual practices are needed to support students?

- How to maintain the movement of students from elementary to secondary school in the same board (e.g., stay in public system or stay in separate system)?
- How do we use the knowledge we have in human development to assist with student learning?
- Do research on the students that blossom in Grade 9. What does a successful transition look like? What grades does it include?

Teachers/Faculty of Education

- How do you support the classroom teacher in developing the skills to understand themselves and their students?
- How can teachers be supported to be supportive of their students?
- Why do elementary teachers leave their schools to teach in secondary schools?
- Do secondary teachers who were once elementary school teachers have better outcomes for their students due to their understanding of the elementary panel, adolescent development, etc?
- What is the effectiveness of different pre-service education programs (e.g., concurrent vs. one-year program)?

Curriculum, Assessment, Instruction, Reporting

- Does integrated curriculum make a difference on student achievement?
- Are the assessment frameworks in elementary and secondary uniquely different or is there a way to make connections so they are more continuous and understandable by students, parents, etc.? Same for report card from Grade 6 to Grade 7.
- Do we need to develop a joint reporting scale from elementary to secondary school?
- Do we need to re-look at what we are currently measuring in the two panels?
- What are the effective strategies for sharing assessment information such as rubrics, etc. that are used between elementary and secondary schools?

Leadership

- Can you have a great school without a great principal to guide and inform conversations?
- Understanding student leadership and power. Where is the power in your school?

Collaboration

- What is collaboration, what does it look like?
- What collaborations are working in the province? Which boards would self-identify in terms of their research-oriented collaboration with a university?
- What are the effects of having a peer mentorship program in Ontario secondary schools? Improve graduation rates? Lower dropout rates? Improve transitions?

Parents

- What technology supports positive relations and networking between the community, parents, and students?

3. **What are 2 or 3 next steps that school, boards, public policy makers and/or researchers could pursue to make advances in this area?**

Collaboration and Relationships

- Take the 7 Grandfather teachings and transform relationships - start with RESPECT.
- Cross panel communication.
- Focus on the connections between elementary and secondary reporting. Have a system of reporting that transcends elementary to secondary school. Does this need to be streamlined, coherent?
- Need secondary school teachers to consider/use techniques in elementary school in high school (e.g., students not in rows but desks are grouped together so they can talk and work together, use of 'Tribes' program)
- "Dialogue between elementary and secondary teachers on content, assessment and pedagogy was critical to positive transitions" (Galton et al., 2003)
- Remove barriers that unions have put in place for teachers to cross over/transfer from Grades 7/8 to Grade 9/10.
- Provide workshops/opportunities for Grade 9/10 teacher to observe/work in Grade 8 classroom. Gain experience on what happens at the different levels/panels. Need dedicated dollars for teacher release.
- Need to remove perceptions/cultural perceptions of hierarchy between elementary and secondary school
- Need all pre-service students to learn K-12 child development so they know about development across the lifespan, not just during specific times.

Faculties of Education/OCT

- Encourage more concurrent education programs so students receive 4-5 years of schooling about human development, sociology of education, etc. instead of trying to learn all of this in an 8 month pre-service teacher program.
- Need to re-look at courses offered to students in pre-service courses so they receive a broader range of information/knowledge about development, etc.
- OCT needs to accredit courses at faculties of education that are broader in scope (e.g., human development) to support transitions.

Research

- Do a long-term qualitative study on a small group of students and their parents – ask questions about their fears, their choices and follow them.
- Pair longitudinal and small local studies building in the leading indicators to help decision-makers who are looking for quick answers.
- How is the school culture important to the integration of students in school and their success?
- What are the potential predictors of success using Grade 6 and Grade 10 EQAO data and other system data such as attendance, suspensions, parent engagement, reading at home, etc?
- Timely and meaningful dissemination of research findings that reach all levels of the education system.

WORKING SESSION 'B'

READING COMPREHENSION

1. What are the implications for practice?

Under implications, there were eight key areas in which conversations focused: early years literacy learning, the influence of new media in society and its relation to literacy learning, the need for a cross-curricular focus in literacy, differentiation in the classroom, teacher education across the system in regards to literacy, parental/community engagement and the student's context in learning literacy. A more detailed summation of each area follows.

Early years

Two general points came out of this area from the breakout groups. Both have implications for literacy programs

- We need to look closely at when to start an organized literacy program for early years' children as they may need opportunities to learn literacy before kindergarten.
- We also need to keep a focus on the ongoing literacy development of people across all age ranges.

New media

New Media, in this context, represents all the different ways that we use text within digital media: from video games and web-based media to text messaging and emails. All have implications for the way literacy evolves; as well as, the various forms that this evolution takes in regard to basic grammar, sophistication and complexity of text and protocols around communication within these forms of media. That said, there were various areas in which the breakout group conversations ranged. Media literacy may be a different skill set than text-based literacy and children may be proficient in new media to a much greater degree than paper-based text. Opportunities to use media to enhance and to support the development of text literacy across all age ranges and school subjects needs to be explored. Equally, the ways that we teach students to discriminate and differentiate the various sources of information available via new media need to be examined. People wondered whether new media is an opportunity or a competitive problem to our standard forms of literacy.

Cross-curricular notions of literacy learning

There were two general areas of discussion in regards to teaching literacy through cross-curricular activities. Many people addressed the need to further support and highlight teaching literacy within all subjects including art and physical education. Equally, there were also some thoughts about the need to support explicit teaching techniques in teaching literacy in different subject areas across elementary and secondary schooling.

Differentiation

This was another hot topic in regard to teaching literacy. Many points supporting differentiation as a key strategy in classrooms were made. But at the same time, many wondered if there is enough support for teachers in operationalizing differentiation in the varying contexts of school classrooms. Points made ranged from bringing a broader and deeper focus on the listening skills of teachers and students as well as questioning skills. There were also quite a few points that focused on the wide range of different skill levels in

literacy within one classroom. This point emphasised the importance of both scaffolding in literacy teaching and the teaching of both foundational and higher order literacy skills in all classrooms.

Teacher education

Several areas of concern in regards to both teacher education programs and ongoing professional development of teachers in teaching literacy were articulated. Many participants wondered if literacy teaching is too mechanistic or technical in current approaches. Participants wanted to see more of an emphasis on creativity of teaching literacy and to license autonomy of teachers and innovation within the classroom. Many wondered if the push for higher assessment results has mechanised approaches to teaching literacy. 'Less technique and more heart' was brought forward as a way to recast what teachers are and do.

Parental and community engagement

Conversation focused on two key areas:

- getting parents engaged in their children's literacy learning and
- aligning the various community services outside of the school to further embed literacy across the community e.g. public school curricular and pedagogic connections to public libraries.

Context and skills of students in the classroom

This was an area that breakout groups emphasised. Points centred on the importance of bringing the students' contexts - cultural and social, into the classroom experience of literacy learning. Questions about what we value and look for in regard to literacy were often brought forth. There were concerns about our own cultural illiteracy in teaching to diverse students as well as the narrow definitions in which we currently think of literacy. There were concerns about gender stereotyping in the ongoing comparison of boys versus girls literacy development and skills. Other key areas of discussion focused on the apparent decrease in motivation and engagement of students with reading as they move through the school system and the need to build more experiential learning into the ways students use and own words.

2. What are some additional research questions?

Questions and research implications in this discussion focused on six key areas: pedagogic approaches to teaching literacy, differentiation within fixed curricular frameworks, methodological issues within literacy research, understanding new media's influence on literacy and opportunity within today's society, parental engagement and teacher education programs. A more detailed look at each area follows.

Pedagogic approaches to teaching literacy

Research issues centered on a wide range of areas. Pedagogic questions about the implications of hearing and listening on literacy development as well as teachers questioning techniques in developing a literacy learning environment in the classroom were touched on often. Equally, there were questions about the lack of attention given in classrooms to the relationship between motivation and engagement in literacy learning. There was a suggestion to develop a 'What works' series on reading comprehension as well as questions on whether the grade 3 EQAO assessment rushed students and teachers in negative ways.

Differentiation of teaching literacy within fixed curricular frameworks

The discussion focused on whether the current curriculum limits or bounds opportunities to teach in more child-centred ways. There were also questions about the meanings of ‘reading comprehension’ to different communities e.g. aboriginal communities and their emphasis on oral language.

Methodological issues within research

This was a key area in which many groups focused. The discussion ranged from the need for research that comes more quickly into the common knowledge base in regards to literacy to issues of transferring theoretical ideas into concrete practices. On a slightly different slant, discussions often brought forth questions about:

- whether we are measuring the right things in literacy learning,
- the contexts of students, teachers, schools and communities as an underrepresented value within literacy research,
- the limitations of current research and
- whether the data we are collecting is the right data.

New media

Questions in regard to new media looked at how the influences of new media can inform curriculum changes. The need to research what exactly are the literacies within new media often came up as well as, how we measure such things as the literacy levels in video games. Equity was also brought up consistently. Issues around access to technology in lower SES communities seemed to be key area that needs more attention.

Parental engagement in children’s literacy

Discussions in this area focused on how to get more parental engagement in literacy learning. The ways we involve parents and how we communicate/support them in this endeavour was addressed frequently.

Teacher education programs

In regards to teacher education programs there was an emphasis on the programs ability to provide adequate skills and opportunities for new teachers to learn about teaching and learning in literacy. Many wondered if the program length is too short while others wondered about the general effectiveness of these programs in providing the skill sets required for teachers to be successful in teaching literacy.

3. What are the next steps or areas for advancement in literacy?

The next steps discussion centred on the following six areas: the need for new strategies for teaching literacy, the need to re-conceptualize the concept of literacy, the need to re-think teacher education programs, the need for new strategies for parents to use in the home with their children, the need to review and re-think our own organizational processes and structures within the education system and the need to bring a broader representative audience to the Symposium. A more detailed discussion of each area follows.

Use of new strategies for teaching literacy

The discussion focused on:

- the need for immediate strategies that teachers can use and
- the need to measure literacy and its various types outside of the classroom. Here, the concept of cultural literacy was important.

Re-conceptualize the concept of literacy to incorporate diverse populations and programs

The discussion seemed to come back to a need to review our overarching goals within reading instruction: what do we mean by literacy? For e.g., are graphic novels a form of literacy? There were points made for the need to develop alternative programs away from classrooms that support literacy learning within communities.

Teacher education

The discussion around teacher education programs questioned the direction that faculties are taking their literacy programs. The time and structure of the program needs to be reviewed with an eye towards bringing a concept of literacy that is more diverse and recognizes the cultural and technical diversity embedded within literacy.

Parental and community engagement

Many points in this area discussed the need for key literacy strategies for parents to use within the home. Outreach to both parents and other community services was identified as important as well as creating 'literacy friendly' environments within schools for all stake-holders.

Re-thinking the structures of school, board and/or Ministry branches

This was a major issue for the breakout groups. There were many points that challenged the current structures and ways we organize our work within schools, boards and the province. There were many points that emphasized the need to re-think these organizations in ways that allow for deeper and broader connections as well as building inter-organizational leadership that moves away from hierarchical models toward sharing both ownership and voice in setting direction.

Equally, many points centred on providing more infrastructure and connections for teachers. The concept of 'change agents' was introduced as a way to re-think how schools and boards work, change and improve. Space and time for collaboration was a central point in this discussion coupled with several points challenging the number of initiatives that are currently running within the education system. A general cultural shift within schools that looks towards collaboration with communities and other schools was brought forth as an important aspect of this but equally recognized as something that may be more of a result of structural shifts in the ways these organizations run rather than a place to start restructuring.

Teacher involvement in symposiums like this

There were many discussions that focused on bringing a broader representative group to these events e.g. teachers and school members.

WORKING SESSION 'C'

- THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENT ENGAGEMENT AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT
- SCHOOL LEADERS' ROLE
- SCHOOL COUNCILS
- FRENCH LANGUE SCHOOL CONTEXT

1. What are the implications for practice resulting from the presenter's findings?

Need to clarify what is meant by parent engagement

- Distinction between involvement and engagement: it means different things to different people. Need to understand the distinction.
- Engagement has a positive impact on student achievement; involvement can be positive or negative (e.g., volunteering on hot dog days – parent is involved but does not necessarily impact on student achievement).
- What are schools' expectations of parents' roles? What are parents' expectations of their roles? May be different than school's perspective. What parents are expected to do does not take in consideration their context and whether they want to be involved or engaged and at what level.
- Out of school vs. in school engagement – key point. Measuring this needs to be addressed.

Strategies to foster parent engagement

- Height of parent engagement is in pre-school/Kindergarten years and it declines through the years. Need to capitalize on heightened engagement in early years. One of the best strategies/policies regarding parent engagement in Ontario is through Best Start Strategy (modelling, universal and sign-up programs).
- Teachers can share effective practices with parents to support achievement.
- Importance of parent's views, perceptions. What do parents think about schools – what is their perspective? Do they feel that their input is of value and that they are equally responsible for student's learning?
- First step in involving parents in school is about feeling safe and welcome.
- Advocate for all kids not just our kids – school councils deal with their own school and not other kids in other schools in the communities.
- Parents are only contacted when there is something “negative“ or “of concern” to discuss. Zero contact with schools unless there is a safety issue – no contact with home. Why not contact parents once a month and say something positive. Are teachers having that opportunity?
- Importance of empowerment – feeling engaged.

- Is there a differentiated set of strategies and involvement from elementary to secondary schools? Engagement declines by grade 7, then increases in grade 8 due to graduation and it is an opportunity to engage parents. The grade 8 / 9 time is a crucial time to engage parents. There's a need for parent engagement in the life planning piece as they move to high school.
- Need to explore how to represent communities in the classroom – in the content
- Inter-parent engagement/involvement is important

Change Needed

- Are schools ready for this type of engagement?
- Changing people's minds and the relationship with parents. Need to change the ways in which teachers see their roles.
- We need to fundamentally change the way schools are operating. There is research that indicates that top-down change does not always work. Bottom-up change does not always work either. A combination of both is required to make sure change is sustained. If there are aspects of school/administrative structure that hinder optimal parent engagement, we should look at how we can change those structures. Change needs to be systemic/organizational as well as involving individuals throughout the system (i.e., superintendents, principals, etc.).
- Links were made to the morning discussion about Aboriginal education. For schools to work effectively with Aboriginal students, we need to identify our own understanding of ourselves in terms of culture, etc.. Responsibility to understand our own framework/structure and use that as a building point for discussions. To work well with parents, we need all levels of educators to identify their own values/beliefs. Ask who we are (assumptions, identity, prejudice, uncomfortable areas).
- Conflicting policies: safety of schools vs. welcoming environment (e.g., safe schools requirements will sometimes make it difficult to engage parents that are marginalized; restrictions on hours parents can come into the classrooms.) Systemically we have structures that prevent parents from coming into the school (e.g., police checks). Clarify purpose of some of the security issues that have become necessary at schools.
- There isn't a culture of parent involvement at the secondary level.

Supports needed

- To change the way educators interact with parents we need to look at ways we can support them.
- Parent engagement should be included in education/professional learning of all teachers – new & experienced.
- Building parent engagement/involvement capacity within school and community.
- Too much to cover in undergrad level (perception is that parental engagement is a minor factor). Is 8 months enough for teacher training?

- Involvement of teachers in research.
- Techniques and strategies to manage this engagement.
- Supports needed for parents in order to engage effectively in their children's learning.
- School community and school liaisons do not exist anymore. Would there be merit to have community and school liaisons? School councils were supposed to replace community liaisons. Community coordinators who bridge the school and the community (e.g., YRDSB) have been very helpful.
- Community development people who represent the community.
- Need to have processes in order to get where we want to go.
- Transition of involvement from elementary to secondary (Ministry and boards could help with that transition)

Power Issues

- When discussing parental engagement, we need to recognize that there are power relationships at play.
- Complexity of what engagement means: Phyllis Dalley's discussion about parents' different expectations of the French language education system parallels the multicultural/multiplicity component in English-language schools.

School Leader's Role

- Differences between involvement and engagement important for administration and staff to keep in mind and know what the different strategies are.
- What are the roles we are willing to ask parents to be engaged in? Parents are willing but administration often doesn't know what parents can do.
- Connecting with parents who traditionally don't have a history of participation
- First Nations – school must go to the parents and communities, not the other way around: community functions, Friendship Centres where people are celebrating. School administration being a part of this on regular basis. Needs to be genuine, committed. Communities have had painful histories, and fear of schools. This fear and reluctance can exist at a band-operated school too. Aboriginal representation needs to be everywhere in the physical school culture.
- This needs to happen on the part of school culture not just the leader because the leader can leave.

- We recognize the importance for students that parents are engaged. This is not an issue of abdication on the part of the school but how do we turn this into a social innovation that engages all parents and kids that have resources to hold on to.
- We need to define how we go about ‘engaging.’ This is about sharing power but just doing so with the elite.
- Principals can be seen as the key to the change. Are they prepared to self analyze and bring it forward and do the whole staff have the skills to go forward?
- Another side of this is student voice which is important too.
- It is a movement from telling parents to asking parents. The social innovation is a perceptual shift of power sharing anchored with the core business of education.
- Understanding the roles of those at the table is important.
- It is important to understand the profile of the parent community. At different stages, parents have different expectations and it is important that parents have a positive initial experience.
- Relationship building is key and parents need to feel they have open access in a comfortable environment. Trust is important element to affirm and sustain parent engagement.
- Community outreach to seek solutions. The outreach to multicultural community is a very complex process.
- *Family* engagement is also an important aspect to keep in mind.
- Listening and surveying needs – to include and address parents concerns and perspectives.
- Leader’s role (Boards etc.) becomes elevating, including and involving various diverse and complex local communities (their cultural and spiritual practices, values, history, identities, practices).
- Principles/Teachings --especially (bravery, love) trust, respect, humility, honesty, wisdom – to guide relationships.
- Re-define ‘spaces’ and ‘places’ where parent engagement takes place to add to comfort and understanding of parents and student’s wider communities.
- Principal’s role and position: parent engagement needs to be reinforced at all levels. Welcome vs. I have a school to run and there are rules to abide by.
- Importance of teacher and principal accountability.

School Councils

- Parent Engagement Office of Ministry is great, but what is being done down at the school level? How do we influence what is going on at that level? How do we break down the barriers of the protectorate of the administrators/system?
- Cooperative work with a partnership of parent groups, teachers and students to communicate – via a co-constructed survey- and draw lessons from this. International Network for School Improvement.
- Parents in School Council did not know how to be involved in the school – easier at elementary level – more barriers for parent involvement at the secondary level – lack of knowledge on how to have more involvement from parents.
- Current School Council members could help identify members to carry on work – establishes continuity in this succession planning.
- Parents need to know best practices regarding how best to set up a parent engagement group and create supports for principals on how to help councils help set up a proper council.
- Facilitate communication in a variety of ways including a variety of technologies.

2. What additional research questions arise from the findings?

Issues of measurement

- Measurement is key. We don't have good measures of engagement and what it looks like as students go through the system. How do we measure parent engagement with both qualitative and quantitative data? How do we do that as teachers and administrators?
- Distinction between involvement and engagement: in order to do new good research we need a good definition of what both of these terms are. Otherwise we won't know what we are measuring (quadrant – engagement and involvement for you own children, then engagement and involvement at a more macro level e.g., school level). We need to do this at a provincial level.

Possible research directions

- Dearth of literature in Canada. Perhaps we should build upon literature in the US that links parental engagement to school success. How can we find out more about parent engagement? Need research specific to Canadian environment.
- Research “with” parents.
- Reviewing literature that looks at characteristics of high performing schools may support progress on this issue (e.g., Constantino).
- Research should examine strategies for engaging groups of parents that are not traditionally engaged.

- Experiments to help examine how the relationships between parents and schools change within diverse communities that are integrating new Canadians.
- Research on diverse cultural groups and engaging parents abounds – difficulty is bringing it into the schools.
- We should look at the interrelation between parent involvement and parent engagement and ask the question, does one come before the other? Involvement in the life of the school; engagement in the educational process – more in-depth analysis of what engagement looks like.
- Environmental scan of how much parent engagement is addressed in pre-service teacher education. Teacher education – How do we approach parent engagement issues with teacher candidates? What does it look like?
- Research identifying successful practices to help engage parents in student learning.
- Ask high-school parents in what ways they are involved/engaged in their child’s education experience. Interrelationship between child development and parent engagement – how does that map onto transitions to secondary schools?
- Need to have a sense of the community before you can address issues around parent engagement. How do we find out more about the diversity of groups that are coming to schools? Approaches to getting that information (without overstepping bounds/intrusion).
- In what ways are parents involved in decision-making in schools? How are parents voices built in classroom policies?
- More information re Toronto’s First Duty, Community Hubs in the Schools – do they make a difference for student achievement?
- Aboriginal research on parent engagement.
- Early Years Report: are they making a difference in parent engagement?
- What do teachers know and believe? How does this shape the culture of the school? What can administration do to better the understanding of staff?
- What can be done to help school staff understand the expectations of the school community and the parent community? (there can be conflicting expectations that no one approach can solve).
- How does parent engagement work over time?
- What impact does having teachers/administration working and living in the same community have on parent engagement? Is there a difference when teachers are a part of the community?
- How does effective parent-teacher interviewing hinder or help parent engagement?

- How to build relationships? What attitude is needed to build relationships?
- Identify effective indicators of engagement (learn from HR work being done).
- Gender considerations.
- Consideration should be given to the time overload that parents experience in helping their children with homework assignments - doesn't leave time for them to be involved in school councils.
- Knowledge of the child and family context – made reference to work of Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot – the parent/teacher relationship is like good neighbours we need to get along and have conversations – we need to have a place for that dialogue – parent knowledge is vast and needs to be looked at and explored – what is the context. Understanding the shared knowledge (crossover or intersection between teacher and parent knowledge).
- How can councils work better, especially given the restraints we are dealing with (resources, etc.)? What is the role of the council in the dynamic of the school? How do we study/measure the role that a school council plays on a day to day basis?
- Building the volunteer resources – how to better understand the effectiveness?

3. What are 2 or 3 next steps that schools, boards, public policy makers and/or researchers could pursue to make advances in this area?

Most viable general next steps

- Involve *all* parents in dialogue about parent engagement (inclusive).
- Define parent engagement and acknowledge diversity of parent engagement.
- Research and identify process for teachers and school leaders to know their communities and broker that knowledge as part of the research strategy.
- One of the ways parents can be engaged in the classroom is through co-planning at the beginning of the school year (on units). Having regular discussions with parents about curriculum, what a child needs to work on and how the parent and the teacher can work together to support the child.
- Look for parallels or models of community engagement and learn from them. Look specifically at results of CURA program: what models of community and university involvement can we learn from?
- Follow-up research with respect to the Parents Reaching Out Grant projects.
- Improved/increased knowledge dissemination is critical. Ensure inclusiveness in communicating knowledge (e.g., Aboriginal).

- Need to tap into Canadian research (OISE, Kari Daly, Carl James, Ken Leithwood). Much of the Canadian research may be embedded in other research (e.g., parent advisory committees).
- Resources, materials, curriculum guides for teachers (e.g., steps for teachers to follow, practical suggestions/ways to increase parental engagement). Start with pre-service teachers and extend to in-service teachers.
- Identify pre-existing/current initiatives (effective models) – express those stories as a way of informing policy direction. We need to know what’s happening that fosters parental engagement and impact on student achievement.
- Trying to understand what the obstacles are to parent engagement – what are they and how are they different across the regions.
- Educating school administrators about the importance of role of the school council (council may be perceived by administrators as a threat) and how to make the milieu inviting.

Most viable steps for leaders

- First step is to understand self. Leaders can learn who they are (assumptions, beliefs). ‘Identity education’ for Boards, teachers, students isn’t available, therefore we replicate our own experience. Knowing ourselves comes before relationships and trust can be built.
- Set parent engagement as a school priority. On-going assessment of sustainable parental engagement and welcoming school environment overtime.
- Find places to meet with parents in their community, coffee shops, faith or spiritual places, etc.
- Increase capacity of schools to use data to understand their community.
- Increase capacity of school staff to engage with parents and link this engagement with student engagement.

Other next steps

- Clearinghouse of effective best practices, check with who already might have these. Leaders can look at what is working in other areas of the country (and beyond).
- Tailored strategies depending on the age of the student; particularly at the key times of kindergarten entry and high school entry (i.e., transitions).
- Research: understand cultural assumptions re: parent engagement
- Look at ways to get parents and educators to re-examine their relationships, not only at the school level but involving the Ministry as well. If we have the right things on paper, how do we turn it into action?
- Continuation of parent engagement panel.

- Use existing professional organizations in education (SOs, Principals, etc.) to ensure that parental engagement gets the “publicity” that is necessary.
- Identify what’s happening in communities to support parent engagement
- We need to make sure that the system is working for everyone/not just a minority few.
- Training for school staff on effective strategies for parent engagement
- Communication between schools, school councils, community and parents
- Support leaders.
- Next steps to be taken on how to best use time and efforts re: role of council in creating principal’s evaluation/assessment
- Re-envisioning the role of the schools. Need for schools to be equipped to make advances in this area. Increase staff capacity to re-envision schools.
- The need to reach out to parent communities – student involvement is critical.
- Measuring effective engagement – how do we do that as teachers and administrators? Get the data on the facts AND the feelings. Use a variety of instruments and methods.
- Leaders can work with front-line persons (secretaries etc.)
- Work with parents and communities (listening and surveying needs – to include and address parents concerns and perspectives)
- Elevate, include and involve various diverse and complex local communities (their cultural and spiritual practices, values, history, identities, practices).

➤ **FRENCH-LANGUAGE EDUCATION**

1. What are the practical effects of the presentation?

General comments on the involvement of parents

- There is not enough debate within the Ministry, the school and the management.
- The degree of involvement versus the degree of interference of the parents should be examined in depth. Certain parents exceed the limits – sometimes the parents are not involved but they challenge everything. We need to know why they challenge. Where should we draw the line? Sometimes, the parents own the school – they come, they sit down on the school couch and do not know when to leave. We should ask ourselves why they challenge. Sometimes they just want information about their children.
- How does the school management get the staff involved? French schools have a double responsibility. How can the school management help the staff establish links with the community? The community is not necessarily close to the school (typical cases that could serve as models).
- Are there other sectors that face the same challenges in getting the parents involved?
- We need to see the intake models.
- We need to educate on both sides, the school management, the teachers, the other staff members concerning parent involvement.

Exogamy and cultural diversity

- In the context of the French language school – parent involvement is related to enrolment. We need to welcome anglophones and exogamous couples and the various communities. We do not face the same issues as the English language schools.
- How to establish a climate of confidence between parents and the school management, including exogamous couples and ethnic groups?
- How to engage the anglophone parents without jeopardizing the vision and the mission of the French language school? How many teachers have asked what the anglophone parents want? We think that the majority always wants to impose its will – for ex., the anglophone parents should not be here – they will cause problems.
- What kind of involvement do anglophone parents want? The parents should talk to other parents that live a different reality.
- Will we begin to speak English in school? We could have a meeting in English in another room.
- We do not need to treat all the anglophones the same way. For ex., a mother wanted to attend the school council meeting – they did not want to let her because she spoke English even if she understood French and did not expect the answers to be in English. The danger with this is that it is so easy to switch to

English if it's easier for the other person. So that could change the dynamics of the conversation. We should also check how the other parents will react to parents who want to ask questions in English (manage without insulting anybody).

- The regular newsletters issued by the school – everything is in French but if you want to speak English, you may call such and such individual (for ex. at the Conseil du district du sud-ouest). So we deal with this on a case by case basis.
- Increasingly important issues due to the thrust of exogamous families – parameters on how to work with these families need to be established.
- There are situations where parents feel they are received as anglophones.
- People also talk about the responsibilities of parents regarding health issues – the way the newcomers understand the expectations. What is familiar to us is not familiar to the new arrivals – our expectations are not always the same.
- We need a process to understand intercultural issues that can cause incidents we do not necessarily understand.
- We need to find ways to recruit parents from multicultural families.
- The fear that the French language school is a place where people are assimilated. I have been hearing about this fear for 20 years!
- Sometimes, the little francophone does not have the opportunity to improve – the class is held back to accommodate those who do not speak the language well. We have to respect the francophone student who speaks French when he comes to school.

2. Additional research issues

- How to accommodate people who do not necessarily speak the language while serving all of our clients?
- The parents will certainly have opposing interests if the expectations are not clearly implemented. The mission of the French language school has already been implemented. Do we have to redefine it? What is the mission and where do we have to stop before the French language school is threatened (the school is anglicized).
- What are the various kinds of parents and how to get them involved?
- Why do students leave French language schools? At the elementary level, parents are more present in schools. What is the influence of the parent on the choice of school, enrolment and retention in the French language school? Why do people choose immersion? Immersion schools also have enrolment problems.
- In areas where there are new arrivals: if the intake model allowed for early arrivals, the students would have the possibility to learn French and would integrate more easily.

- Research – survey/interviews: Why do parents leave the French language system? There are problems in the absence of specific methodologies – reason for leaving, destination, status (certificate or diploma). A major shortcoming when it is stated “reason for leaving” on a form. The word leaving the school is interpreted differently and if we do not talk to the parents, we do not necessarily know the specific reasons for which the children leave the school.
 - We submitted a project under the Special Agreement to undertake a study in this field.
 - Those who leave are asked why and why not, ask those who stay why they stay.
 - Relation with the otherness – it is not a concept people understand. It means to be present for the person in front of you – it means understanding the person with whom we speak, with their differences and similarities. All of the intercultural skills help you understand the other – so that gives your relation with the otherness. We have to work at the level of the construction of identity. We have to look at it in relationship to many things, not only in relationship to the francophonie.
 - How are we going to present all this issue of the multiethnic class to the teachers, the school principal, etc.?
 - How do I work with teachers who learned in a colonized environment (the notion of schoolmaster, which is different) and who have different expectations? We need to provide tools to the teachers in multicultural communities.
- 3. 2 or 3 actions that the schools, the Boards, the decision-makers or the researches may undertake to advance this field**
- Proceed with research (enrolment and retention) at the school level. Follow the models that work.
 - Why do certain students stay and others leave?
 - Why do parents choose the French language school? Why not? Why do they leave the system?
 - This research must demonstrate the reason why people choose the French language school (for ex., bilingualism, on-line education, student success in secondary schools and key positions students hold after the secondary school).
 - Role of the province: develop guidelines to frame these discussions and access to good practices.
 - Role of school boards: review local policies.
 - Follow-up must be ensured with a longitudinal study.
 - Research in the other communities and other countries.
 - This morning, 3 out of 4 people mentioned Joyce Epstein’s research (Johns Hopkins University). It must be an interesting model. She worked with disadvantage people. Go see this model and adapt it to our realities.

- We have to do a reflexive practice if we do research: a process of continuous thinking about the impact of research.
- The aménagement linguistique policy (PAL) on page 3 speaks of the mission of the French language school. Take action at the quality level. Ask the schools : how do you implement this policy ? The way it is done. Begin to develop the terms of reference of the French language school. Has it been reviewed and included in the discourse?
- International symposium

WORKING SESSION 'D'

Session D provided participants an opportunity meet with others from their region and to describe the research activities they are involved in – including the research topics they are investigating, how they are applying their research results to policies, programs and practices, and how they are communicating their results to educators, parents and each other. Part of the impetus for this session was to give participants a chance to see how the work of others might help them or how their work could help others.

What emerged from the discussions is evidence of considerable collaboration among the participants. The follow are just some examples:

Boards collaborating with each other

- the MISA (Managing Information for Student Achievement) Professional Network Centres were often described as a regional focal point for research related activity
- the Northern Ontario Education Leaders (NOEL) a consortium of leaders of educational organizations, was also described as central to the research activities of northern school boards; NOEL, among other things, is supporting research on oral language and improving outcomes for aboriginal students

Education associations and other organizations

- Ontario Early Years Centres are working with school boards on a study of school readiness
- The Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association is collaborating with the Hospital of Sick Children on matters related to special education and assistive devices
- The Ontario Math Association is leading a project on mathematics and parent engagement
- The Canadian Education Association publishes research findings in its journal Education Canada
- The Association of Education Researchers of Ontario holds fall and spring conferences as well as meetings of subject interest groups throughout the years; these events draw in school board, university and ministry researchers
- The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) is measuring and reporting on the state of learning, participating in knowledge exchange and dissemination activities, and filling research gaps; the CCL is seeking school boards to pilot survey instruments that can be used by the board to guide policies, programs and practices.

Faculties of Education working with the Ministry and with boards

- The University of Windsor, Faculty of Education, is working with school boards on differentiated instruction
- The University of Ottawa is working with French-language school boards
- Preparation of the “What Works” research papers series is being produced between the Ontario Association of Deans of Faculties of Education and the Ministry
- Local school boards in the Peterborough area are working in concert through the Trent Collaboration
- Faculty at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education / University of Toronto is providing research for the Ministry on attitudes, skills and behaviours that foster parent engagement
- There is collaboration between Lakehead University and NOEL on one study of cross-cultural competencies among teachers and another on the math skills of teachers
- Lakehead University is also working on aboriginal language revitalization in the Treaty 3 area
- Laurentian University is involved with the Hospital for Sick Children and the Ministry in a study of transitions from elementary to secondary school.

There were expressions of interest in further outreach and partnerships among the various organizations. Also, the idea of recreating something akin to the Ontario Education Research Symposium at the regional level was mentioned several times.

Planning Committee Education Research Symposium 2007

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