

PDIG Project #14037 - Literacy For All : Building Blocks
Final Report

Project Description:

Our project was an offshoot of last year's PDIG Project whereby we identified the essential learnings to focus on in the area of Reading Response for students in Kg through to Grade 6 at Parkview Elementary School.

Our project focus this year was on developing a Vocabulary program for our Cycle 1 students. Being predominantly francophone, our students often enter Kindergarten with very little or no English. Our Kindergarten and Cycle 1 team firmly believe that improving the vocabulary of our students will directly result in better reading comprehension, thus lead to higher success rates in Reading at level. Our goal was to develop a Vocabulary program to intentionally allow students to boost their vocabulary from the get go. We also want continuity so that the program can carry forward into Grades 1 and 2. We also want a strong visual component throughout in order to really drive the learning.

Our first major hurdle was logistical: finding enough substitute teachers so that we could all work together on the project. That proved impossible and delayed the start of our work. Once we got going, the challenge was definitely in figuring out how best to organize our words. Kindergarten teachers had to decide if word lists should follow their present method of introducing one letter per week, or if there was a better way to organize their words with themes. Grade 1 teachers had to decide which themes they wanted to cover, and the order in which they should be covered as well. A good chunk of day 1 was spent on discussion of different possibilities as to how to best move forward. Kindergarten teachers agreed on following their existing model of introducing a letter per week, and would focus on finding words that made sense for the letter, and for the time of year it was introduced. They also decided to include verbs or action words as well. Once this difficult decision was made, it was pretty smooth sailing as the focus then shifted to finding appropriate images to go with the words. We want a visual word list that we can make cards from, or make handouts to send home for cutting up so that our students can learn and practice their words. We had two requirements for our cards: a good clear image and the word written below it in English. Fortunately, there are many excellent websites with free materials for the taking: namely, *mes-english.com*

Grade 1 teachers also spent most of day 1 of the project discussing how they would like to organize their words – and quickly agreed that by theme made the most sense. They then spent the remainder of the day discussing themes, and eventually ended up not only agreeing on themes, but on the order to introduce them to the students throughout the school year. The next project days saw the team choose specific words for each of the themes. Eventually, they added verbs in three tenses and basic phrases to the mix as well. They also wanted good clear images with the words written underneath. Again, free websites were helpful – particularly the *measuredmama.com* - where we got most of what was needed.

The remainder of the project days were spent on word selection, finding images for the chosen words, putting them in desired order, creating documents for distribution to students, writing letters for parents describing the program and how to support their children in acquiring new vocabulary; and discussing creating checklists for assessments. Grade 2 teachers joined the project midway through the process, and more decisions were made – namely, making the program a cycle program versus a Grade 1 and Grade 2 program. Math vocabulary words were also added to the list. Students will be provided with word lists (with images)- some to remain at school and some to go home, and more discussion about checklists took place. In the end, it was decided that a booklet would be created which would be distributed to students in Grade 1. The booklet will then follow the students in to Grade 2 for use there.

Project Goals:

In the end, our project objective was met! This was in large part due to the excellent synergy of the Cycle 1 team at our school, and the fact that so much material is available online. Not only was a Kindergarten and Cycle 1 vocabulary program created, but all the necessary materials to make it happen were developed, created and made as well. Another contributing factor is that we had a very clear picture in our minds about what we wanted to accomplish. With this in mind, we were definitely able to focus on the end goal throughout the process.

Project Outcomes:

The pedagogical exchanges and discussions between teachers were definitely a huge gain. It allowed them to feed off of each other and acquire new and deeper knowledge of the teaching of, and learning of vocabulary. The more obvious gain of course, is the new vocabulary program that is ready to roll out in the new school year. We are super excited and looking forward to trying it out! The main reason is because we fully expect to see immediate results indicated by higher levels of success in Reading. We will be sure to track carefully in order to assess whether tweaks are needed or not for future use.

Re-investment:

The work done by the Cycle 1 team is definitely worthwhile sharing with the educational community at large. We will be sharing it with other schools in our school board by putting it on our drive and sharing it first with the ELA consultant, who will then be able to share it with other schools. We highly recommend it for any student who needs visual support in learning new vocabulary – in particular, second language learners.

Any project that allows its team members to grow professionally, time to discuss pedagogical challenges and to brainstorm ideas for solutions, is definitely work that should be carried out by teams. In allowing our team to do this, we were able to tailor a program to better meet Parkview

Elementary School's students' needs. We would encourage any and all schools wanting to do the same for their particular reality to do so. The end result will be something designed just for them, and will have a better chance of being effective.