

2018-2019 PDIG Final Report

Keeping the Balance in Balanced Literacy



Submitted on May 6th, 2019 by:
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Project Members:

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- 1. Project Description: Describe/show to what degree the project was carried out as planned. Include what went well and what proved to be a challenge. Include a synthesis of your journal entries & project goals*

Project Description:

Our project went as planned with regards to the number of half-days the team met. The meeting dates changed, and we also added some team members using additional funding at the school level. Therefore, we were happy to include resource teachers, kindergarten teachers and a Learning Centre teacher to our team to represent the whole school.

As mentioned in the application, this project stemmed from instructional planning time carved out of our work schedule during the previous school year. We did work to coordinate our instruction across the grade levels and between languages, to develop a writing and reading grid including skills, strategies and assessment. Our discussions brought research-based reading and writing approaches to the table, and some time was spent on including the Units of Study in our planning. Teachers began using the Units with their students and reported back on their findings during meetings.

Successes:

Most of our goals were met, with some new ones being added. Teachers found that they were able to make better use of the professional resources (Serravallo, Gear, and newly added Units of Study - Lucy Calkins) because of the project release time for reading and discussion, and to ensure effective instructional practices between teacher partners through student writing samples and reading assessments.

Also, we were happy to share our ever-evolving planning before the end of this project by inviting an RTI team from one of our school board's high schools (Chateauguay Valley Regional) to share the best practices that have evolved from our collaboration and to ensure the transfer of learning between elementary and high school as well.

Challenges:

The team faced some challenges with regards to the format of the grid. As this project included teachers from all the grade levels, more discussion time was needed to come to a consensus. Hence, our grids are not finalized, but the team plans to carry them forward to the next school year, with a first meeting already scheduled for one of the pedagogical days in August 2019.

Also, due to substitution and scheduling challenges, our team was mostly able to meet in language teams only instead of the proposed cycle teams.

Synthesis of Journal Entries:

Half-day 1, October 18th, 2018

English teachers met during the first three periods and French teachers during the last three periods. We reviewed our writing grids that were developed during 2017-2018 and started to improve upon the format, including an expectation and formative/summative evaluation column. We also discussed how we could merge our reading and writing grids into one.

Half-day 2, November 1st, 2018

For this meeting, both language teams met separately and reconvened at the end of the school day for a group discussion. Topics that were discussed included:

- which learning outcomes will be focused on at each grade level
- which writing activities can be used with mentor texts
- types of mentor texts used.

Our NFSB language consultants (S. Collins and S. Dumouchel) spent the day with us and helped guide our discussions and evaluate our needs.

Half-day 3, December 6th, 2018

The French team met with Sylvie Dumouchel to discuss an article about *Les ateliers d'écriture* (Units of Study). A time block was planned to read and plan our instruction with our newly acquired resource *Les ateliers d'écriture*. PD opportunities were discussed and almost every French teacher in the school will attend a conference on *Les ateliers d'écriture* on January 17th. Teachers also confirmed which reading strategies will be targeted at each cycle.

This is the meeting where the English teachers met with the RTI team from the local high school. The CVR team wanted to hear about our school's process and work so far to inform their own approach. We shared implementation ideas, professional resources and moments of deep reflection and realizations that are helping improve our teaching. The teams discussed key features necessary to ensure student success and how our collaborative model could be implemented at the high school.

Half-day 4, February 27th, 2019

Both language teams took some time to fill out their writing/reading grids. A decision was made to merge both grids (reading and writing) to ensure the balance and complementarity between reading and writing, and ease the process. We made time to read professional resources and discuss a balanced literacy activity that could be done in class to report on for the next meeting. A discussion was held on the use of portfolios to track student writing samples and reading levels from K-6. We already have a system to track reading levels and reading assessment samples from K-6 in both languages, in the form of a binder that gets passed along from teacher to teacher. It is our intention to do the same for writing and our writing assessments next year.

Half-day 5, March 28th, 2019

The French team worked with their language consultant today. She helped guide our discussion about our students' reading levels and what we can change or improve in our instruction to help students improve.

Every teacher reported on a literacy activity they did in class that involved a picture book/mentor text and a writing task, which will be included in our grids. It was very informative to hear what other students are doing in different classes with regards to the strategies we decided to focus on at each grade level and colleagues giving input/advice/suggestions for improvement.

Both teams identified the importance of ensuring that our reading assessments were as standardized and reliable as possible. Therefore the last meeting included a GB+ and PM reading assessment refresher training with our consultants for all teachers.

Half-day 6, April 18th, 2019

After the training session on GB+ and PM Benchmarks, one student did a reading assessment for the English team and another student for the French team. Every teacher did the evaluation process and shared their results. We realized that a combination of theory (training) and practice (actual assessment) was needed to ensure uniformity in our assessment approaches. Not every teacher evaluated exactly the same way, especially for the retelling and comprehension questions, therefore we had to come to a consensus. Following that session, an information sheet will be added to the evaluation binders for future reference in the years to come. It is also our intention to perform a reading assessment refresher every year with the whole teaching team in order to ensure the reliability of our subjective reading assessments.

As this was our last meeting, teachers decided to complete their grids on their own time, and to review them on one of the ped days in August 2019.

2. Describe/show to what degree the goals of the approved project were met. If the goals were only partially met or not met at all, describe the reasons for this.

Considering this synthesis of journal entries and related goals, the reason why a few goals outlined in the application project were not met is because of time and scheduling issues. A session with high school teachers was added to our meetings. A new resource purchased by the school for every teacher (Units of Study/Les ateliers d'écriture), was added to our list of resources to use and implement, therefore we had to slightly modify some of our discussions and time spent on completing our planning grids. We will continue the process and finish our expectations/strategies, tools & instruction/evaluation grids at the beginning of the next school year. Furthermore, we developed a plan for the types of genres of text that will be targeted with our writing instruction for each grade level. This plan is also supported by a list of mentor texts that can be used to support reading and writing activities for each of the genres targeted.

3. Project Outcomes: Describe/show the gains that the participating teachers achieved through this project.

There were great benefits for the teacher participants through the discussions and planning sessions held. The release time helped us develop our balanced writing and reading grids, as well as build collaborative and professional learning community within our staff. We are constantly looking for PD opportunities and strive to combine newly acquired knowledge with familiar practices.

Serravallo, Gear, and the recently added Calkins to our list of professional resources have further informed the way we teach. It is important to note that all of these resources are available in both English and French. We have attempted to ensure transfer in our learning across the languages by investing in the same translated professional materials. We have made links between the works of these best practices and we have planned different ways to with integrate them together in our planning. We have noted that students were able to apply strategies with more confidence, demonstrating a better initial grasp of concepts in both languages.

Lastly, we have made a point of keeping a balanced literacy program and have now included this initiative and our continued work in this area, in our school's new Educational Project.

- 4. Reinvestment: Clearly describe how the resources created and/or the learning achieved by the participants can be of benefit to the educational community at large. If applicable, comment on whether this project should be carried out by other teams and if so, how it could be improved.*

We would like to continue our instructional planning for the next school year, carving time out of our daily schedule, which our principal plans on doing again. We will be able to finalize and implement our grids next year. Our principal has also committed to keeping our workload as similar to this year as possible. This will provide us with an opportunity to reinvest and continue our work at the same grade levels. This should lessen the planning time required to build literacy activities and assessments for our students and allow for more feedback and conferences with students. We will be able to evaluate if our grids are user-friendly, and if we need to change or add anything. We will also be available to hold discussion sessions to share and explain our grids and offer support to teachers wanting to use them.

We would also like to implement the Units of Study-Ateliers d'écriture at the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year, and record our findings (best practices and strategies, connections, transfer of learning...) in our ever-evolving balanced literacy grids.

We would like to offer LCEEQ a link to our school's SharePoint site where our grids and other documentation will be uploaded, as they will evolve over the years to come.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to thank the LCEEQ team for giving us the much-needed time to have these essential conversations about teaching and learning, develop further understanding and clarity of purpose in our balanced literacy approaches in an effort to increase the quality and impact of our work and ultimately, improve student success.