

Project Description

The project "Students As Authors - Phase 2" was an extension to the project "Students As Authors" which was carried out during the 2018-2019 school year. Phase 2 of the project was created to address the needs of classroom literacy teachers who wish to improve their practise of teaching writing within the elementary and Cycle 1 Secondary ELA program. The project aimed at providing teachers with resources and time, and to work collaboratively with other ELA teachers who teach at the same level and have similar challenges. The project also incorporated building capacity and relationships with each school and between schools.

The first face-to-face workshops took place in two different schools, Grosse Ile School on the Magdalen Islands and Flemming Elementary School on the North Shore. The format of these two workshops were the same. Before conducting the initial workshops, teachers were asked to collect narrative writing samples which would be used to assess student strengths and challenges, and will aid teachers in determining the next steps and how the writer's workshop model can meet the needs of each student at their level of development. Since there were new teachers to the project this year, they were asked to complete a survey to reflect on their current practise of teaching writing experiences with writer's workshop, 6+1 traits of writing, concerns and questions of implementing a writer's workshop in their classroom.

The overall goal for the first day of the face-to-face workshop was to ensure that teachers would be prepared to begin/continue a writer's workshop approach when they returned to their classroom and to foster collaboration, as well as building community at the school level and within the board. The focus of the workshop was on the basic framework of the writing workshop and the organization of the classroom. Teachers had an opportunity to observe in a grade 5-8 ELA classroom and see the writing workshop in action. The latter part of the day was spent looking at resources with regards to writing and conferences such as: The Writing Strategies Book by Jennifer Serravallo, Writing Conferences by Carl Anderson, and Patterns of Power by Jeff Anderson. At the end of the first day teachers debriefed and developed plans for implementation/continuation of the writing workshop in their classroom. The second day of the workshop focused on formative writing assessment and writing conferences. Teachers assessed the samples of student writing that they have collected through the lens of 6+1 Traits of Writing, and the Spelling and Conventions Continua from Lynn Senecal. Before actually assessing the student samples, teachers looked at two writing conference videos by Carl Anderson and discussed how they could implement the writing workshop in their class in order to support students' needs. Teachers also had an opportunity to observe in a grade 3-4 classroom and see the writing workshop at a lower elementary level. At the end of the workshop teachers worked collaboratively to plan their initial days of writing workshop.

As a follow up to the project (up until the pandemic arrived), teachers worked individually or with colleagues to observe each other, plan writing units, research mini lessons and suitable mentor texts, as well as examining student writing and improving rubrics.

The latter part of the project was not completed as lockdown enforced school closures. We planned to have another face-to-face meeting with four team members(only ones available

at the time) on the Gaspé coast in April. At this meeting we were to observe once again a classroom in action, as well as collaborate ideas and debrief how we implemented the ideas from the project into our classrooms and end the project. This collaboration with others is very important when living in isolated areas.

Project Goals

Overall the goals of the project were met, even though we were unable to complete the latter part of the project. Time was provided for teachers to meet, discuss, and work collaboratively through face-to-face meetings, as well as work individually or in pairs after the initial meetings. Connections and relationships were built between teachers and schools who face similar challenges. Collaboration and team building is very important in the ESSB as many of our schools have a geographical gap, and project opportunities such as this are often restricted due to financial reasons and travel expenses.

Project Outcomes

The project had many positive outcomes. Teachers in the project stated that they noticed their students writing more and were eager to have individual quality time with their teacher during writing conferences. Teachers felt they were able to support students with their writing by guiding them with certain strategies they could work on during writing conferences. Students seemed to be more engaged when they had a clear focus for their writing and had more choices when it came to the writing workshop. Teachers appreciated being able to observe classrooms that had already implemented the writing workshop. Teachers also appreciated the different resources that were suggested in the workshops, as well as the videos that were shared during the face-to-face meetings.

Reinvestment

Unfortunately the wrap up meeting for this project was cancelled and the shared folder that we planned on organizing during this meeting did not happen. In addition, at the beginning of the project the team members agreed to share the findings of the project at the ESSB Marking Centre in June, but due to the pandemic situation this did not happen either. However, teachers did share ideas and findings with each other at the school level, as well as with other colleagues in the board.