

Promoting and Nurturing Best Practice: Teacher as Researcher

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***SFU Graduate Programs
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Leading Change in Education***

**Findings of case studies of
12 BC schools engaged in
collaborative action research**

(See publications at www.sae.ca)

About the program

- Three cycles of school improvement grants since 2002 awarded to action research teams in schools with challenging circumstances
- Criteria included detailed plan, annual reports, “critical friends”
- Case studies contribute to the knowledge base on school improvement and suggest “ways forward” in improving the life chances of our most vulnerable students.

Process of the Report

- Literature Review
- Methodology
- The role of the research associate
- Review
- Editing
- Production
- Dissemination of the results

Key questions:

1. How did these schools build capacity for improved student achievement?
2. What can we learn about promising practices for schools with challenging populations?

Action research and collaborative inquiry are processes which:

- Develop ongoing professional orientations
- Involve challenging deeply held beliefs and taking risks
- Identify focusses for instruction
- Require “building the plane in the air”
- Are “back and forth” between theory and practice
- Are enriched by qualitative and quantitative forms of evidence, produce “slow” results

Sustainable Structures for Shared Responsibility and Leadership

Family and Community

Collaborative
Professional Action

Personalized Student
Learning

Shared leadership capacity requires:

- Structural and philosophical support visible and tangible at the school and district level. (eg Heath Elem, Prince George)
- Careful attention to relationships. Agree on a few things “we do together”. Make room for diverse contributions. (eg 12th Ave)
- Developing structures for succession and shifting players, so that momentum is not lost. (eg. Alexander)

Meaningful professional learning and action requires:

- A spirit of Inquiry facilitates the dialogue (eg Jarvis)
- Purposeful collaboration is challenging
- Invites “risking, rehearsing, refining, reflecting and relating” new skills (eg West Heights)
- Coaching and “side by side” teaching is effective (eg New West)

Personalized student learning requires:

- “Balanced Literacy” involving reading engagement and reading practice, deep understanding, identity, investment and cultural responsiveness (eg. Alexander)
- Enabling classroom assessment practices: quality feedback (eg. Heath)
- Building resilience (eg. Ruth King)

Focussing on learning leads to sustainable improvement when....

1. Assessment FOR Learning becomes part of the culture of the school. Consistent yet flexible strategies are applied to instruction and shared with students. Assessments are differentiated, frequent and tied to student learning in real ways.
2. Professional learning, informed by deeper understandings of how students learn, is visible in changes in instruction.

3. Personalized interventions, “critical learning paths” and profiles enable student learning, by subgroup and individually.
4. Flexible groupings and “sharing students” becomes the norm amongst the staff-collaborative ownership

Working with vulnerable students and families

- Each individual has resources that greatly influence achievement; money is only one. Poverty is the extent to which an individual is without these resources.
- Teaching is what happens outside the head; learning is what happens inside the head. For these students to learn, direct teaching must occur to build these cognitive structures.
- Relationships are the key motivators for learning for students from generational poverty. (Payne, 1996)

Strengthening Family and Community Connections

- The impact of poverty on school achievement has been largely ignored in current educational reforms.. (Cummins, 2006)
- The quality of support, nurturing, and stimulation depend on the quality of children's day to day experiences where they live and learn (Hertzman and Kohen, 2003)

Family & Community

- Personalized home communications and relationships for vulnerable students are crucial. Differentiated involvement strategies are necessary to reach families. (eg Jarvis)
- Community services are most effective when co-ordinated with the school as “the hub”. (eg Guildford Park)

The Way Forward

- **Government agencies responsible for health, welfare, and children and families need to work with the education system to improve wrap-around services for families at risk. The school needs to be the hub of such support.**

- **Beyond the focus on teaching key skills and strategies, “literacy” interventions for vulnerable students need to be robust and inclusive, responding to students' backgrounds and abilities in the primary, middle and secondary years.**

- **More examples need to be shared about what effective teachers and schools do to build resilience and community with vulnerable students. (eg Guildford Park case study)**
- **To support improvement efforts with vulnerable students, schools, principals and districts need to provide flexible resources for sustaining collaborative professional learning and action.**

Ongoing Questions....

- FSA results and year to year school based assessments did not show linear improvement?? Does this matter?
- Should schools with challenging circumstances receive extra resources from the province, the district?
- How can schools and families work together to improve attendance for vulnerable students?
- What can districts do to mitigate the effects of transience?

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