

DR. STIRLING MCDOWELL
Foundation
FOR
RESEARCH INTO TEACHING



**TEACHING AND LEARNING
RESEARCH EXCHANGE**

**Evan Hardy Collegiate
Literacy Initiative**

Evan Hardy Collegiate Literacy Committee

Project #131
November 2005

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- 4) encourage organizations as well as individuals to determine and act in areas of research and inquiry; and
- 5) encourage experimentation with innovative ideas and methodologies related to teaching and learning.

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I wish to thank the McDowell Foundation for approving our research grant and for its encouragement as we explored new methods and practices in improving the reading proficiency of secondary students.

I would also like to thank the members of the Evan Hardy Literacy Committee for their patience, understanding and support of one another. Without their contribution and commitment to promoting and encouraging literacy within the school, we would not have been able to meet the challenges we faced along the way.

The Evan Hardy Collegiate Literacy Committee Members:

Lillian McKay	Shaun McEachern
Carol Jensen	Arlene Proctor
Joanne Ebenal	Kim McGillivray
Kevin Sawatzky	Garry Davis
Brenda Brossart	Chris Mirwald
Jack Nepjuk	Myra Clarke
Glenda Kadyschuk	John Dewar
Fay Elke	

Our Research Question

Research has shown that reading is the fundamental skill upon which all formal education depends. If we believe this to be true, what can we do, at the secondary level to assist all of our students in improving their reading proficiency?

Research into the acquisition of reading has found new ways to teach students how to become proficient readers. Our purpose in implementing a school-wide literacy program was to increase our students' reading competencies and instill in them an enjoyment of reading that will continue throughout their lives. Our objectives were to:

- 1) increase our students' ability to make connections and find meaning,
- 2) increase the time students spend engaged in making predictions and inferences,
- 3) explicitly teach comprehension strategies, and
- 4) create opportunities for students to engage in literacy activities in the content areas.

Who We Are

Our original group consisted of ten members and grew to fourteen. Our Literacy Committee included members from English, math, science, social sciences, physical education, special education, the school library, and administration. Together we brought to the research a diverse range of career stages, experiences, subject areas and grade levels. Representation from all subject areas allowed us to explore how secondary teachers approach literacy within their subject area.

Although we were a very diverse group, we shared many commonalities – the most important being our belief that students who are experiencing academic difficulties because of low reading proficiency can and must be helped to become better readers.

Our committee included the following:

Lillian McKay – Senior English teacher with 14 years of experience
Shaun McEachern – History teacher with 5 years of experience
Carol Jensen – History teacher with 17 years of experience
Arlene Proctor – Teacher-librarian with 29 years of experience
Joanne Ebenal – English as a Second Language teacher (ESL)
Kim McGillivray – English teacher with one year of experience
Kevin Sawatzky – Senior Math teacher with 17 years of experience
Garry Davis – Senior Math teacher with 19 years of experience
Brenda Brossart – Senior Chemistry teacher with 18 years of experience
Chris Mirwald – Physical Education teacher with 10 years of experience
Jack Nepjuk – Assistant Principal with 22 year of experience
Myra Clarke – Special Education teacher with 12 years of experience
John Dewar – Principal with 15 years of experience
Glenda Kadyschuk – Counsellor and chair of PD committee
Fay Elke – Assistant Principal and chair of the committee

Our School Community

Evan Hardy Collegiate was built in 1965 and is part of Saskatoon Public School Division. We are situated in an upper-middle class neighbourhood close to the University of Saskatchewan. Evan Hardy is also home to our division's Visa program for International students. Our student enrolment for 2004-2005 was approximately 1300 students and our student population is relatively stable.

Our Research

OUR START...

Our journey began after administering a student survey to our entire student body. When we compiled the responses and analyzed the data, we discovered that a large percentage of our students were not engaged in reading. Teachers felt this lack of reading was reflected in lower academic success and it was decided, as a staff, that we would establish a committee to address this issue.

BELIEFS AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

REGARDING TEACHING AND LEARNING

1. All students can learn to read.
2. Reading instruction has to be carried out in an environment that is emotionally and psychologically safe for students.
3. Reading opens up a whole new world of possibilities.
4. Increasing reading proficiency of our students will result in better overall academic success and will increase our students' self-esteem.
5. Increasing literacy proficiency is everybody's job, not just the job of English teachers.

REGARDING RESEARCH

1. It is a learning experience for everyone involved.
2. Our mistakes will not prevent us from making progress.
3. We will see not only benefits to individual students, but benefits for the whole school.

Our Start

We began by asking classroom teachers to identify students who they believed were experiencing academic difficulty due to a reading problem. (See Appendix A). Our goal in identifying these students was to establish a Reading classroom whereby they would receive explicit instruction in reading.

Once these students had been identified, we contacted the parents/guardians and informed them of the Reading class and the benefits that would ensue. We obtained their permission to test these students with the Gray Owl Reading Test (GORT) to determine their current reading level so that we would have a baseline to measure any improvement. (See Appendix B).

Our next task was to provide training to the teacher who would be teaching the Reading class. At this point in time, it was decided that our English as a Second Language teacher should also receive training. This training was provided through our school division, through participation at external conferences and by studying the research literature on reading acquisition. Armed with this knowledge, a small contingent of our Literacy Committee sat down to write a locally developed course for the Reading class that would allow students to obtain two course credits – one at the 10 level and another at the 20 level.

Providing Opportunities

In the meanwhile, our Literacy Committee was busy promoting literacy in other areas of the school. Posters were developed depicting both staff and students engaged in reading. These posters were displayed in classrooms and hallways around the school. It was impossible to pass through the halls of Evan Hardy and not know that “Evan Hardy Reads!”

Our Art department produced book marks of student art with our “Evan Hardy Reads!” motto on the back. These bookmarks were distributed to every student in the school as they were encouraged to read.

Our librarian set aside one lunch hour per week to hold a “Readers’ Retreat” in the library. This time was set aside for students and staff to engage in some quiet, uninterrupted reading.

We held a book-drive in the month of October, rewarding students with a small Hallowe’en chocolate for donating a book. Many of the books donated were children’s books that we donated to our neighbourhood elementary schools. Some of the other books went to making up classroom libraries so teachers could have a variety of reading materials on hand for their students.

We also asked teachers to collect data once a week on the types of materials being read by our students and the number of minutes they were engaged in reading. (See Appendix C).

Challenges

Our Reading class was underway, but our teacher felt that she needed more resources than she had access to. Our ESL teacher was focussing on teaching reading to the International students in her classroom. With the assistance of our librarian, an extensive list of resources was compiled for both classrooms. (See Appendix D). Also, the writing of the locally developed curriculum was proving to be a slow and time-consuming process. There was much anxiety over whether we would have it in place for the end of semester one so that we could grant these students their credit.

Retaining power and control over practices is critical. The reading process is not a linear sequence of steps, but rather a recursive process. Our Reading teacher decided what needed to be taught, how she was going to teach it and the resources she would require to do so. Each class allowed time for silent reading, read-aloud and discussion, building vocabulary, classifying words, creating sentences and writing paragraphs. At the same time she was developing some positive relationships with her students and was already noticing a change in the attitudes of some of them.

Other departments were called upon to provide materials from their subject areas that could be used in the Reading class. This was a movement towards more teacher involvement in the reading initiative and shifted some of the responsibility to other staff members. While our Reading teacher was very clear about what needed to be taught, she was more relaxed about the manner in which she taught it.

Sharing Our Progress

PARENTS

Information about our literacy initiative was shared through newsletters, parent council meetings, parent-teacher interviews, and word of mouth. Parents were invited to encourage reading at home. One could not walk the halls of Evan Hardy and not know that reading was an important component of the school.

By the end of the school year, the students in the Reading class had increased their reading level by an average of two grade levels when administered the GORT. The parents and guardians of these students were very pleased that their children had the opportunity to be in the Reading class. We found that they were spreading this good news to other parents in our community as we received a number of emails and calls from other parents requesting this class for their child next year.

OUR SCHOOL

In an attempt to keep our initiative at the forefront, the Literacy Committee was involved in a number of school-based Professional Development days throughout the school year. We asked our various departments to discuss what they were doing to teach and promote literacy in their subject areas. The results are listed below:

1. USSR time in every class (ELA)
2. List of supplementary reading books
3. Read scripts regularly (Drama)
4. Interpret meaning from symbols (Math)
5. Choice of own reading materials (Drama, ELA)
6. Bonus marks for extra reading of scripts (Drama)
7. Newspaper reading (Law, Computer/Commerce)
8. Teachers bring in last book or two that they read and discuss with class.

9. Recommend books by same author being studied (ELA)
10. Reading lists in all subject classrooms about the subject (fiction, biography, etc.)
11. Place interesting books in the classrooms
12. Book analysis instead of research papers
13. Giving assignments that require reading
14. Noon hour reading sessions
15. Reading time in class
16. Handouts/tests: All information is not taken in class, must read to prepare for test
17. Textbook questions
18. Research projects
19. Web quests
20. Newspapers - current events - magazines
21. Multiple copies of the History Magazine
22. Novel study discussion groups that are student-directed (they make their own meaning from the literature)
23. Newspaper article distribution
24. Read aloud to students
25. Read, reread, clarify vocabulary

We presented our staff with data on the types of materials and the number of minutes our students were engaged in reading. Some of our findings were quite interesting to our staff and dispelled some pre-conceived ideas about who was reading the most.

**MALES - NUMBER OF MINUTES SPENT READING PER WEEK
(SAMPLE)**

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Grade 9	22329	17048	13401	14934
Grade 10	28326	23691	16943	15499
Grade 11	19611	18552	10082	12528
Grade 12	23275	25841	19485	15533

**FEMALES - NUMBER OF MINUTES SPENT READING PER WEEK
(SAMPLE)**

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Grade 9	17119	16006	11529	21077
Grade 10	25017	20487	16610	15889
Grade 11	26225	22179	12198	16870
Grade 12	14261	15405	13736	14267

Our Reading teacher also presented a reading lesson to our staff so that they could see firsthand how reading acquisition occurs.

OUR DIVISION

Our school division was launching a division-wide initiative, Literacy for Life, in the 2004-2005 school year and our school initiative fit into this nicely. News of what was happening at Evan Hardy Collegiate spread quickly within our division and before too long, all of our collegiates were interested in offering a Reading class in their own buildings. There was much sharing between collegiates as we all looked at ways to engage our students in reading.

The Future

Our school division has launched a three- to six-year Literacy for Life initiative that makes continuing our school literacy initiative that much easier. We have been able to access professional development in our own city and have the support of superintendents, coordinators and consultants. It is our hope that every collegiate is able to maintain a viable Reading class and that the elementary schools will continue their good work in this area.

In Answer to the Question

Our research question was: What can we do, at the secondary level to assist all of our students in improving their reading proficiency?

We believe that our literacy initiative at Evan Hardy was a success. We were able to establish a Reading class to address the reading needs of our students. Our ESL students are also continuing to receive instruction in reading. We have promoted, encouraged and celebrated reading within our school and will continue to do so. We have teachers thinking about literacy and how they can incorporate it into their lessons. We believe we have established a school climate and culture at Evan Hardy where reading is valued and supported.

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APPENDIX A

READING CLASS STUDENT REFERRAL FORM

STUDENT NAME: _____

DATE OF BIRTH: _____ GRADE: _____

REFERRING TEACHER: _____

- AREA/SUBJECT(S) OF CONCERN:

- DO YOU BELIEVE THIS IS A RESULT OF A READING PROBLEM? *YES NO*
- LIST ANY BEHAVIOUR ISSUES

- ATTENDANCE: *POOR FAIR GOOD*
- WAS THIS STUDENT IN RESOURCE THIS YEAR? *YES NO DON'T KNOW*
- HOME SUPPORT:

- OTHER COMMENTS:

- OFFICE USE

RESOURCE SUPPORT IN 2004/2005 <i>YES NO</i>
CAT3 SCORE (GRADE 8): _____
HOME CONTACT:
REGISTER: <i>YES NO</i>

APPENDIX B

October 18, 2004

Dear Parents/Guardians:

Re: Evan Hardy Literacy Initiative

This study has been approved by the Saskatoon Public School Division.

Our purpose in implementing a school wide reading program is to increase our students' reading competencies and instill in them an enjoyment of reading that will continue throughout their lives. Our objectives are to: 1) increase our students' ability to make connections and find meaning, 2) increase the time students spend making and confirming predictions and inferences, 3) explicitly teach comprehension strategies, and 4) create opportunities for students to use critical thinking strategies. We plan to in-service our teachers in delivering reading instruction, and to conduct ongoing assessment with our students to check for increased reading competency.

Your son/daughter has been randomly chosen to participate in a reading assessment which will be administered by trained staff members on (date and time), 2004. This will take approximately half an hour to forty-five minutes. We are asking your permission for your daughter/son to participate in this research study.

Participation or non-participation in the study will not affect your child's schooling or grades in any way, nor will it affect the research.

The results of the reading assessment will respect anonymity and confidentiality as much as possible.

If you or your son/daughter agree to participate and later one of you changes your mind, your or your child may withdraw from the study by calling Fay Elke at 683-XXX.

Before the end of the 2004-2005 school year, the data and interpretations of the data will be written into a report which will be stored at the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation for Research into Teaching website. It is possible that articles for teacher and educational researcher journals will also be written from the results of this research.

If you have any questions regarding the research, or if you have any concerns about the research, you may call Fay Elke (683-XXXX).

Yours truly,

Fay Elke
Assistant Principal
Evan Hardy Collegiate Institute

APPENDIX D

READING RESOURCES

READ TO SUCCEED

Calhoun, Emily F. *Teaching Beginning Reading and Writing with the Picture Word Inductive Model*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD 1999.

Joyce, Bruce & Weil, Marsha with Calhoun, Emily. *Models of Teaching*. 7th Ed. Boston: Pearson. 2004

GENERAL READING RESOURCES

Beers, Kylene. *When Kids Can't Read: What Teachers Can Do. A Guide for Teachers 6-12*. Portsmouth: Heinemann. 2003

Dawe, Robert, Duncan & Mathieu. *Resource Lines 9/10*. Scarborough: Prentice Hall. 1999.

Gallagher, Kelly. *Reading Reasons: Motivational Mini-Lessons for Middle and High School*. Portland: Stenhouse. 2003.

Lesesne, Teri S. *Making the Match: The Right Book for the Right Reader at the Right Time, Grades 4-12*. Portland: Stenhouse. 2003

McTeague, Frank. *Shared Reading in the Middle and High School years*. Markham: Pembroke. 1992.

Reading for Academic Success. Grades 7-12: Powerful Strategies for Struggling, Average and Advanced Readers. Richard W. Strong [et al.]
Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin, 2002.

Robb, Laura. *Teaching Reading in Middle School. A Strategic Approach to Teaching Reading That Improves Comprehension and Thinking*. Toronto: Scholastic, 2000.

Tovani, Cris. *Do I Really Have to Teach Reading? Content and Comprehension 6-12*. Portland: Stenhouse, 2004.

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The Vocabu-Lit Series: Perfection Learning.
A literature-based vocabulary program. Grade 7-8-9. ASCD. 2002.

Billmeyer, Rachel & Barton, Mary Lee. *Teaching Reading in the Content Areas: If Not Me, Then Who?* 2nd Ed. Aurora, Colorado: McREL. 1998.

WEBSITES

<http://knowledgeloom.org>

The Knowledge Loom is a place for educators worldwide to do the following:

- review research that identifies best practices related to various themes
- view stories about the practices in real schools/districts
- learn to replicate the success of these practices in your own organization
- add your stories, knowledge and questions to the collection
- participate in on-line events and discussions
- discover supporting organizations and resources

This resource is developed and maintained by The Education Alliance at Brown University.

<http://www.glencoe.com/sec/teachingtoday/educationupclose.phtml/12>

Teaching Today: Education Up Close Teaching tips and helpful articles published by Glencoe/McGraw-Hill, a division of the Educational and Professional Publishing Group of The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.

<http://linus.icoe.org/reading/cal/strategies.htm>

Content Area Literacy Strategies: Teacher descriptions, contact information and reflections are posted on this website.

<http://www.aea6.k12.ia.us/reading/Unit%2011%20PWIM.pdf>

This is the PWIM model

<http://www.enc.org/professional/guide/results/connect/document.shtm?input=BYD002459-reflect>

The inductive model.

<http://teacherweb.com/BC/DeltaResourceCentre/JayeSawatsky/>

An overview of PWIM

Inspiration: Version 7.5 – 2003. [CD ROM]

Inspiration Software Inc.

The Rosetta Stone: Language Library. English Level I. 1995. Virginia: Fairfield Language Technologies.

TEACHER READ ALOUD RESOURCES

Fulghum, Robert. *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. Random House Inc. New York, N.Y. 1986.

Fulghum, Robert. *It Was On Fire When I Lay Down On It*. Random House Inc. New York, N.Y. 1991.

Harvey, Paul. *The Rest of the Story*. Doubleday. New York, N.Y. 1997

Meyer, Stephanie H. and John. *Teen Ink: Our Voices, our Visions*. Health Communications, Inc. Deerfield Beach, FL. 2000.

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Toutant, Arnold. *Endless Possibilities: Identities 9*. Oxford University Press, Don Mills, Ontario. 1998.

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