LEADING FOR LITERACY: BUILDING CAPACITY FOR SCHOOL-WIDE IMPROVEMENT

by

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Abstract

This collaborative inquiry documents the experiences of five secondary school teachers who worked together to improve teaching and learning by developing a Literacy Inquiry Team. The purpose of this study was to explore connections between teacher leadership and school improvement, specifically by attempting to improve literacy instruction through collaborative, teacher-led initiatives. The collected data documents our collaborative planning, instructional changes, as well as our perceptions of our instructional improvements as the Literacy Inquiry Team moved through the seven stages of Sagor's (2000) action research process. The analysis revealed that teachers in a wide range of subject areas can make a mental shift in their thinking to believe in the effectiveness of literacy instruction in building student capacity for learning. The findings suggest that teachers will make a larger commitment to making further instructional improvements after they see a connection between literacy instruction and deeper student learning. The findings also demonstrate that collaborative inquiry teams are an effective way for teachers to begin building shared meaning (Fullan, 2007) and capacity for improvement. Finally, the collected data documents my leadership growth as I led the Literacy Inquiry Team. I identified several skills that are necessary in leading an inquiry team to improve literacy: these skills include establishing a shared vision for improvement, supporting teachers with resources, developing a culture of support, encouraging varied approaches while maintaining a common team focus, and developing a data driven system to evaluate student learning.

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Glossary

Capacity: When capacity is high, "teachers work as a community to respond with a variety of teaching approaches aimed at the unique needs and interests of learners" (Mitchell and Sackney 2009, p. 10). Stoll (2009) defined capacity as "a power – a habit of mind focused on engaging in and sustaining the learning of people at all levels of the system for the collective purpose of enhancing student learning in its broadest sense" (p. 125).

Differentiated Instruction: Hume (2008) defined differentiated instruction as "effective instruction that is responsive to the diverse learning needs and preferences of individual learners" (p. 1). Differentiated instruction is a "comprehensive framework…for how we understand [both] teaching and learning" (p. 1).

Gradual Release of Responsibility: This instructional model was developed by Pearson and Gallagher (1983). Over time and in a series of steps, the responsibility of completing tasks shifts from the teacher to the students. The goal is for students to eventually take responsibility for learning. In this inquiry, I also use the term when I discuss teacher learning as members on the Literacy Inquiry Team take on more responsibilities, and rely less on the team leader, as they eventually conduct their own classroom inquiries.

Learning Community: "a learning community consists of a group of people who take an active, reflective, collaborative, learning-oriented and growth promoting approach towards the mysteries, problems and perplexities of teaching and learning" (Mitchell and Sackney 2000, p. 9).

Literacy Inquiry Team: TIPS (Teacher Inquiry Projects) are teams of teachers that are

working together to explore ways to improve their teaching (Allington, 2006, pp. 146-147). Although TIPS usually take action after conversation about change and planning has taken place, our team will be reading the literature, having conversations about literacy improvement, and taking small action steps and reviewing the results of our work, all at the same time. Because the focus of our inquiry is instructional improvements that will improve literacy, I will be referring to our inquiry team as the Literacy Inquiry Team.

Mindset: Dweck (2006) identified two ways in which people perceive intelligence and learning. Those with a fixed mindset regard intelligence as innate and unchangeable. These people are uncomfortable with change and worry about failure. On the other hand, people with a growth mindset believe that intelligence is cultivated through challenge and effort. These people actively seek challenges and opportunities to develop. Senge (2006) used the term "mental models" to describe our deeply held beliefs or our "internal images of how the world works" (p. 8). He added that mental models can "limit us" when we rely on "familiar ways of thinking and acting" (p. 8).

MSS Literacy Team: The MSS literacy team is a team of teachers and administrators who meet periodically to discuss opportunities for improving literacy at Meadowview Secondary School.

Participatory Action Research: Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) defined participatory research as "an alternative philosophy of social research...often associated with social transformation" (Kemmis & McTaggart, p. 568). Participatory research necessitates a community focus on change: there is "shared ownership" of the

research with all participants in the community group, the group is working together to analyze the problem and interpret the results, and there is "an orientation toward community action" (Kemmis and McTaggart, p. 268). Simply put, participants are working as a community to invoke change.

Professional Conversations: Professional conversations occur when teachers work in teams, engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning. This process, in turn, leads to higher levels of student achievement. Dufour (2004) explained that "the powerful collaboration that characterizes professional learning communities is a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice" (p. 4).

Professional Readings Team: TAPERs (Teachers as Professional Education Readers) are a way to get teachers together to talk about professional readings (Allington 2006, p. 143). The goal is to create an opportunity for teachers read about literacy, to educate themselves about methods of more effective teaching, and to share their learning with others on the reading team. Professional readings teams are related to professional inquiry teams such as TIPS as teachers on reading teams are working to educate themselves about ways to improve instructional practices. Professional inquiry teams may also read the literature by other teacher researchers that have worked to transform teaching practices (Sagor 2000, pp. 16, 17).

Pyramid of Interventions: A term applied to the system of supports that a school provides for its struggling students (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker & Karhanek, 2004).

Reading Comprehension Strategy: A reading comprehension strategy is "an intentional plan that is flexible and can be adapted to meet the demands of the situation" (Tovani 2004, p.5). Strategies "give readers options for thinking when reading words alone doesn't produce meaning" (p. 5). Strategies can be taught to students to help them monitor their reading comprehension, to help them to make inferences and connections, and to help them repair their understanding when comprehension is lost.

Summary Assertion: A summary assertion is a summary of "what you believe you have learned from your findings in response to each of your [inquiry] questions" (Sagor, 2000, p. 135).

Thoughtful Literacy: Thoughtful literacy is when "we go beyond remembering and through the discussion we demonstrate our thinking" (Allington 2006, p.116). When we demonstrate "our thinking, we demonstrate our understanding" (p. 116). Allington argued that thoughtful literacy "goes beyond the ability to read, remember, and recite on command" and that students can develop this ability to understand what they read through instructional "models and demonstrations" (p. 116).

Glossary of Instructional Strategies for Literacy

The members of the Literacy Inquiry Team experimented with a wide range of literacy instructional strategies. For clarity, some of these strategies are defined here.

Connections: Students can be encouraged to think deeply about a topic they are reading about through activities that invite them to make a connection between the reading and their personal experiences (Gear, 2008). For example, students can make connections between two or more readings, between a reading and a film, between the reading and a current event, or between what they already know and new learning.

Double-Entry Diary: This strategy is designed to help students to monitor their reading comprehension (Tovani, 2000). Students are asked to make a two-column chart. In the left hand column, students record details and summaries from the reading. In the right hand column, students make written responses to these details, record their reactions, or make connections or inferences.

Graphic Organizer: Graphic organizers are charts that students make to help them to identify and categorize information from the reading.

In-Context Vocabulary Activity: Students are asked to make an intuitive guess at the meanings of vocabulary words based on contextual clues found in the reading.

Inferential Thinking Strategies: These are activities that invite students to make intuitive assumptions or logical guesses after they finish reading.

KWI: This is an acronym for Know, Wonder, Infer; it is an adaptation of Gear's (2008) OWI (Observe, Wonder, Infer) strategy. This strategy is similar to the KWL strategy, except instead of inviting students to share what they have learned from

the reading passage, they are invited to make an inference or intuitive assumption based on what they know.

KWL: This is an acronym for Know, Wonder, Learn (Ogle, 1986, as cited in Buehl, 2009). Before students read, they are invited to share what they already know about the topic. Next, they are asked what they wonder about the topic. After reading, students share what they have learned.

Magnet Words: Students are asked to make a list of key words from the reading passage. This strategy helps students to locate main ideas while omitting details that are of lesser significance to the reading passage (Buehl, 2009).

Peer Editing: Peer editing is an activity that teachers can use to help students to improve their editing skills and their written work. Students work together in pairs or in teams to read each other's written work and to discuss ways to improve it. Students use this feedback to make revisions to their work.

Personal Response: In a written personal response, students are asked to share their personal thoughts, reactions, connections, as well as any inferences they can make about the reading passage. In a written summary and response, students are asked to recall the main points of the reading passage and then to write a personal response.

SEA: This is an acronym for Statement, Explanation, and Analysis. This activity encourages students to provide more thoughtful responses to questions. First, students provide a brief statement to answer the question. Next, students write a detailed explanation to support their answer. Finally, students are encouraged to share a deeper understanding of the topic by putting the facts together and making

a new connection or inference. Analysis helps students to answer the question, "So what? Why is this significant?"

Show Me Your Thinking: Students create a Double-Entry Diary and are invited to show their thinking in the right hand column (Tovani, 2000). I have adapted this strategy. Instead of recording factual information in the left-hand column, students simply record the page number. In the right-hand column student's record their reactions, ask questions, make responses to the reading, or record connections and inferences.

Silent Reading Program: Part of the instructional time is routinely devoted to silent reading. Students are encouraged to choose their own books. The objective is to help students to become better readers by increasing the amount of time students spend reading.

Sort and Predict: This is a pre-reading strategy. Students are given a list of words from a reading passage. They are asked to analyze the meanings of these words and then to try to sort them into word groupings. Students then give each group of words a heading. Students are then invited to make a prediction about what the reading passage might be about based on their word groupings (Brownlie & Close, 1992).

Student Friendly Rubrics: These are assessment rubrics that are written in language that students can easily understand. When written work is returned to students with a score, students can use their rubrics to make sense of the score and to see where they can make revisions. Student friendly rubrics are designed to teach students the criteria for success and to help students to self-monitor their written work.

Visual-Verbal Poster: This activity is designed to encourage students to select, summarize, and synthesize information from a reading so it can be presented in a poster format. Visuals and concise summaries tell the story or capture the facts that are presented in the reading.

Wonder Web: In this activity, students brainstorm questions they have about a topic before they begin reading (Gear, 2008). They write the topic in the center of a piece of paper and then add new questions, and connect them with lines or "webs" to the main idea. Each new question can also inspire a new level of questions, which are added to the web.

Writing Template: These are sample paragraphs that students use as writing exemplars, designed to show students what excellent writing looks like.

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Dedication

I dedicate this piece of work to my loving children, Danya and Kenndy Baker. Being a parent has made me a better teacher and both of you have helped make this work that much more meaningful.

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to explore the connections between teacher leadership and school improvement, specifically by attempting to improve literacy instruction through collaborative, teacher-led initiatives. I also sought to discover if collaborative inquiry teams might be an effective way for teachers to build shared meaning (Fullan, 2007) about instructional improvement. The focus was on adolescent literacy instruction at Meadowview Secondary School (MSS), an inner city school of just under 1400 grade eight to twelve students in Prince George, British Columbia.

At the time of the study, from September 2009 to January 2010, I taught English Language Arts 11 and 12. During the same semester, I was also working with a group of grade eight students for thirty-five minutes per day to assist them with improving their reading comprehension skills. Through collaborative inquiry, the research team, which included a Social Studies 10 teacher, a languages teacher, a Planning 10 teacher, a literacy coach/Combined Studies 10 teacher (English Language Arts and Social Studies 10 combined) as well as myself, worked together to improve the quality of our literacy instruction. We evaluated the reading materials we use for accessibility and explored strategies to increase reading volume for our students and to assist students with reading comprehension.

In working with the Literacy Inquiry Team, I led the group through the seven-step action research process (see Figure 1) that was suggested by Sagor (2000). We met together as a team seven times over the course of one semester, and during this time we worked together to identify student needs, discuss instructional strategies, and review the

progress we were making in implementing changes to better meet student needs. In each meeting we refined our study and planned the next step of the inquiry. In our final conference, in early January, we met with the MSS Literacy Team to share our classroom inquiry questions, findings, summary assertions, and action research plans. This was a time to hear suggestions from the MSS Literacy Team about how we might build further capacity for improved literacy instruction at MSS.

1. Selecting a focus
2. Clarifying theories
3. Identifying research questions
4. Collecting data
5. Analyzing data
6. Reporting results
7. Taking informed action (Sagor, 2000, pp. 3,4).

Figure 1. Sagor's (2000) seven-step action research process.

Research Questions

In addition to coordinating the Literacy Inquiry Team and participating in the study as a co-researcher, I also documented the progress of the study. My research focus for this study was improving literacy instruction through teacher leadership. My guiding question was:

How can literacy instruction be improved through collaborative teams?

I gathered data to answer the following literacy leadership questions:

1. What specific changes will teachers make to their teaching (instruction, reading materials, and comprehension strategies) to improve reading and comprehension in their classes?

2. What are teacher's views on the success of these changes?

3. What is required of a teacher leader in guiding a process of teacher inquiry to improve literacy instruction?

Data sources included:

1. Anecdotal observations, thoughts, and comments recorded in a field journal

2. Transcribed data collected through reflective interviews of the members of the Literacy Inquiry Team

3. Group brainstorming work, as well as graphic reconstructions of our thinking

4. Evidence of instructional changes by the participants

5. Data collection plans and timelines made by each of the participants

6. Interview data to reveal the perceived effectiveness of instructional changes

7. A compiled list of the findings made by members of the Literacy Inquiry Team after we analyzed our data

8. A list of summary assertions made by the members of the Literacy Inquiry Team

9. Transcribed data of the action research plans as they were presented to the MSS Literacy Team

As a researcher and teacher leader, I was interested in how teachers from various content areas could work together to implement instructional improvements to assist students with literacy. This study was really a small, albeit important part of a larger effort to improve learning at MSS. After an analysis of the study, I am optimistic that I can more effectively lead the MSS Literacy Team to take a school-wide view of school improvement with a focus on literacy and learning. This action plan will build on what has been learned from the study to include a thorough analysis of our students' literacy needs and, in all content areas, measurable goals for student success that are supported by

a thoughtful data collection plan. Finally, there will be a sustainable implementation plan that is driven by collaborative inquiry and teachers' professional learning.

Rationale

Over the five year period preceding the study, the staff of MSS had been working very hard to improve student success and as a result, the teachers and administrators have made great strides in improving teaching practices. In asking ourselves how we could better assist students in their learning, we were forced to examine our roles as teachers as well as our teaching and assessment practices, to change things that were not working as we investigated better teaching and learning practices, and to create a *pyramid of interventions* to assist students when they are not successful. The staff at MSS began to function as a learning community. Mitchell and Sackney (2000) defined a learning community as a "group of people who take an active, reflective, collaborative, learning-oriented and growth promoting approach towards the mysteries, problems and perplexities of teaching and learning" (p. 9). At MSS, teachers adopted a community focus in discussing educational issues and creating initiatives to improve teaching and learning and the overall climate of the school.

Teachers and administrators at MSS had made substantial improvements: students reported that they felt more connected to MSS and provincial exam scores were the highest in recent years. However, I still saw opportunities for improvement. Many of the students at MSS did not engage in much recreational reading and many struggled with reading and writing in their courses. Language Arts teachers, including myself, had been charged with the task of improving literacy and we were doing what we could to assist students. However, despite our efforts, we still saw an unacceptable amount of

superficial, low-level comprehension and lack of insight in student writing. Literacy improvement had not been a school-wide focus for change at MSS. I believed that there was a need to explore reading and comprehension strategies and to assist our school literacy team with the task of building teacher capacity for literacy improvement across the curriculum. Literacy matters in all subject areas and so my objective was to work with teachers in a wide range of secondary school subject areas to have them explore the value of teaching reading and thinking skills.

MSS had made great strides to improve teaching practices and student learning. Furthermore, interventions had been put into place to assist students when they were not successful. There was now a strict attendance policy at MSS that drastically minimized the number of days that students were away from school and there were mandatory classroom support blocks at lunch and after school to assist students who were achieving less that 60% in Math, English Language Arts, Science, or Social Studies. Other interventions were still the domain of specialist teachers, who worked with students who were identified as having specific learning needs.

All of these programs were worthwhile and indeed necessary; however, in most cases, our focus was more on treating the symptoms than on what Allington (2006) considered the root cause of low student achievement. Allington maintained that secondary schools play a role in creating negative attitudes toward school and reading. He stated that many classrooms at the secondary level provide students with "a steady diet of hard, boring (in their view) books" and as a result, "they exhibit little in the way of literacy development (and academic progress) during the middle and high school years" (p. 177).

I believed that through teacher leadership and collaborative professional inquiry we could provide opportunities for teachers to enhance their teaching of literacy. As a teacher leader, it was my goal to work with teachers across curriculum areas to help them to become more aware of the accessibility of classroom reading materials, to explore ways to supplement texts with high interest reading, and to implement strategies to improve student learning and develop higher-order comprehension skills.

Statement of the Problem

The question that focused this study was:

How can literacy instruction be improved through collaborative teams?

In an effort to share in our teaching practices, teachers at Meadowview Secondary School have professional conversation time built into the teaching day. Furthermore, teacher leaders come together to work on initiatives as part of the technology committee, learning resources committee, and teacher leadership team. The spirit of the learning community is alive and well. Nevertheless, the task of teaching reading and comprehension skills has been left to English Language Arts teachers, despite the fact that students take four classes each day and read a significant amount in most of their other classes.

I believe that there can be significant improvement made in student achievement if teachers, regardless of their teaching areas, take a coordinated approach to teaching literacy. By pulling teachers together to analyze the appropriateness of the reading materials they use, explore and share ways of increasing student interest and reading volume through supplemental reading, and sharing with them strategies that they can teach students to help them to improve their reading comprehension, I expected that teachers could make learning deeper and more meaningful.

This study explored the potential of teachers working in concert to build a shared understanding of the importance of teaching literacy. The next challenge will be to build capacity outside of the Literacy Inquiry Team. I am optimistic that the members of the Literacy Inquiry Team generated interest in our work as we shared our successes with other teachers in professional conversations and with the members of the MSS Literacy Team.

The literacy literature supports an expectation that once awareness is raised about the importance of literacy instruction, interest will be piqued and some teachers will be ready to find out how to implement a program in their own classrooms. Coordinating the Literacy Inquiry Team was the first step in raising this awareness and encouraging teachers to be reflective about their teaching practices. I also believe that the Literacy Inquiry Team will be able to assist with formal planning and implementation of a wider plan to promote literacy at MSS. The results of this study will have an impact on the direction of a school-wide literacy plan.

I believe that the most challenging part will be building capacity outside of the Literacy Inquiry Team. Five teachers took part in this study: a Social Studies 10 and Art 10 teacher, a languages teacher, a Planning 10 teacher, a Literacy Coach/Combined Studies 10 teacher (English Language Arts 10 and Social Studies 10), and myself (I teach English Language Arts 11 and 12). Each of us tried new instructional strategies and made literacy an important part of our teaching.

At the time this study was planned, there was representation from seven different curriculum areas on the new MSS Literacy Team, including Art, Music, English Language Arts, Social Studies, Spanish, Math, and Science. The librarian was also part of

the team as was a vice-principal. I believe that it is advantageous to have such a diverse group on the team and that the Literacy Inquiry Team's initiative to develop literacy instruction across the curriculum will spread with the assistance of the school literacy team. Professional conversations and professional development can be expected to provide a vehicle to share ideas with teachers who are not on the MSS Literacy Team.

Limitations of the Study

As a qualitative, school-based study, the findings from this study are not generalizable to other settings. However, they do present a case study of literacy and leadership learning that others may find informative.

Perhaps the largest limitation of the study is its brevity. In a single semester, which is the length of time I conducted the study, we have only began the task of building the teacher capacity that is needed to create school-wide literacy improvement. Furthermore, much more time will be needed to reach a point where reluctant teachers are swayed by the success of this professional inquiry. MSS has over eighty teachers and so I suspect that it will take time to build large capacity for school-wide literacy improvement. Furthermore, it is likely that there will always be some teachers who are not engaged in the change effort. There is, however, the possibility for future studies of literacy improvement at MSS, especially for a study of the sustainability of the program.

It is also difficult to measure the success each teacher has with implementing improved literacy strategies in his or her classroom. Teachers have their own interpretations of success and these are certain to be biased. Nevertheless, part of the inquiry is focused on questioning and interpreting one's own data to substantiate perceptions. I relied on the members of the Literacy Inquiry Team to give their

perceptions of literacy improvement based on the data that they themselves collected and analyzed. Other factors were easier to monitor, such as increases in reading volume and the frequency of the use of specific instructional strategies, but again I relied on teachers to interpret and communicate to the Literacy Inquiry Team how effective these literacy improvement strategies were in their classrooms for improving student success.

As some curriculum areas are more content heavy than others, I suspected that not all teachers had the same flexibility to incorporate literacy instruction into their teaching. Although this is not necessarily a limitation of the study, I anticipated that although some teachers would fully embrace the idea of teaching literacy with fewer decisions to make in terms of changes and cuts to the content they were teaching, others would choose only to dabble with it, incorporating less wholesale changes to how they delivered the content of the curriculum.

One final limitation is that the quality of the research depended on the skill and willingness of each of the team members to collect data. Nevertheless, part of the teacher leadership problem was how to motivate and assist the team with the inquiry process, including the collection and interpretation of the data.

Parameters of the Study

In this study I relied on teachers to assess whether or not literacy instruction was making a positive impact on student learning. However, as the focus of the study was on teachers and teacher capacity and because teachers in different curriculum areas took slightly different approaches to implementing a literacy program (some teachers were able to implement more time for reading and writing than others), it was paramount that they have their own interpretations of the success of literacy in their classrooms.

Nevertheless, some common criteria were established collaboratively to assist us in communicating the successes of our literacy improvement initiatives.

Ethical Considerations

Before this study began, approvals were given by the principal of Meadowview Secondary School, the superintendent of School District 57, and the UNBC Research Ethics Board. There was also written consent from each of the teachers participating in the study. Participants were informed that they were free to remove themselves from the study at any time and that any data gathered would not be used in reporting the findings. All data gathered was made available to the research participants during the study and a summary of the thesis will be given to each participant once it is complete. To ensure anonymity, participants are referred to using pseudonyms. Each participant was verbally thanked for their contributions and once the study concludes, each participant will receive a written letter of acknowledgement for the contributions made to professional inquiry and academic research in education.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this literature review is to gather information that will inform teacher leadership in terms of professional learning related to literacy instruction, and processes, including professional inquiry, that may be expected to facilitate that learning among colleagues. The literature review is a search for instructional strategies that will foster thoughtful literacy for students and initiatives that can be expected to improve literacy by building teacher capacity. Rather than simply noting authors and their ideas, this literature describes authors' recommendations in enough detail for practitioners and developing literacy leaders to consider for relevance in their own setting. The books and articles selected for this literature review served as a catalyst for informed action to improve literacy instruction at MSS.

In this review I examine two strands of literature: the first is concerned with developing a reading culture for students and the second strand focuses on developing a culture of experimentation for teachers. Allington (2006) and Tovani (2004) and Gear (2008) have contributed to each of these strands and have helped to shape my vision of what a comprehensive, cross curricular literacy program can look like. These three authors have helped me to see how making simple instructional changes might lead students toward deeper learning and improved attitudes toward reading and writing. They have also been inspirational in that they encourage teachers to be creative in their approaches to teaching literacy. Mitchell and Sackney (2009) have shaped this vision as well; they have provided me with a better understanding of learning communities and the importance of honoring the diverse needs of learners. Lastly, Sagor (2000) has provided a practical plan to inform my approach to teacher inquiry.

What Does the Reading Classroom Look Like?

In listing the characteristics of classrooms that stimulate reading and higher-order thinking around reading, Allington (2006) pointed to the importance of student choice in assignments and reading materials, authentic reading and writing activities, group work, and an instructional emphasis on higher-order thinking. My own experience tells me that not all classrooms look like this. Sadly, I think that some secondary school classrooms are much less stimulating for learners than many elementary school classrooms, where choice in reading materials is encouraged and differentiated instruction is more common. Allington, in citing research done by Ivy, Smith and Whilhelm, and Worthy and McCool, agreed:

> [there are] huge gaps between what adolescents report they like to read and what is available in middle and high school libraries and classrooms. They also note that there were few occasions for self-selection of reading materials – teachers almost always assigned reading materials and rarely was there time set aside in school for independent reading. Ivy also notes that attitudes toward reading were often powerfully shaped by the nature of the classroom environments (p. 176).

Allington (2006) also emphasized the importance of matching a student's reading ability to the books he or she reads. He proposed several simple strategies for estimating a book's reading difficulty and encouraged teachers to observe students as they read to monitor if they are showing mental or physical signs of frustration (pp. 63-65). Another recommended strategy is to teach students to communicate to the teacher if something is too difficult to read. Allington added that students can use a simple "three-finger rule," where they read the first couple of pages of a book or article and "hold up a finger for every word they cannot read" (p. 67). If there are more than three words that are too difficult, then this might be a read that will prove frustrating for the student. This strategy is designed to help students to self-monitor their reading when they select books and to

help teachers to approximate whether the books selected for students are appropriate without the need to measure reading levels precisely. A guideline is suggested by the Lexile framework for reading (lexile.com), which states that if students comprehend less than 75% of what they are reading, they are likely experiencing frustration and the book might be too challenging and a poor fit for that student (Lexile Framework, www.lexile.com).

Whenever leveling books is not possible, for example in Science or History class when students are working with text books, which tend to be difficult to read, then it makes sense to supplement the text with more accessible readings. Additional readings are also helpful when they provide added interest and background knowledge about the topic being studied. Allington (2006) explained that there is good reason to add variety to the materials we choose for our students:

> If struggling middle and high school students in your school experience a steady diet of hard, boring (in their view) books, there is no reason to be surprised that they exhibit little in the way of literacy development (and academic progress) during middle and high school years (p. 177).

Tovani (2004) concurred. Many texts are poorly written or written at a level that far exceeds the reading abilities of the students who are using them. It is unrealistic to expect that every student in a Social Studies class will have the reading skills or the background knowledge required to make a firm connection to the material written in the text book. Accessible reads, such as newspaper and magazine articles, that are short, engaging and well written "help students make a connection between school subjects and the real world" (p. 39). This material can be supplemental to the course text when better texts are not available.

Certainly some teachers might resist reexamining the texts they use in their classes and might make the argument that by making reading easier we are removing the rigor from academic courses. I have also heard the argument that academic rigor must be maintained because we are preparing our students for university study in which they will read many more books, most of which are at a much more difficult reading level than those used in secondary school classrooms. The reality is, however, that high school classrooms are full of a wide range of reading abilities, and although some students will go on to further university study, many struggling readers will not. I think that Tovani (2004) made an excellent point when she argued that the goal of supplementing texts is not to lower "standards of rigor," but to "give students something that they actually have the potential to understand – and maybe even finding a piece of text that will turn kids on to the content" (p. 40).

Reading Materials

If *differentiated instruction* and matching students' reading abilities and interests to books are keys to keeping secondary school students reading, then it makes sense for teachers to find ways to engage students with a wide range of reading materials. Allington (2006) maintained that magazine and series books, what some consider to be "junk" books, should be encouraged because, even though the writing might not always be of the highest quality, "mediocre books…create the skill and interest necessary to read the better quality books" (p. 79). It should also be noted that some series books and magazines contain examples of excellent writing. Furthermore, adults should not discourage students from selecting magazines and series novels, as competent adult readers do spend "substantially more time reading magazines and newspapers" (p. 77).

Nevertheless, despite there being "more than a hundred" magazine titles published for adolescents and children, few classrooms encourage reading them as part of a classroom activity (p. 77).

Classroom book collections and teacher book talks are other ways to encourage and pique student interest in reading (Allington, 2006). Classroom collections can focus on Science, Art, or Social Studies, or to simply provide choices for silent reading. Allington suggested that when building the classroom library, it is important to identify the difficulty of the books that are being selected. Books can be purchased or come from donations. It is important to display books in a way that makes them "accessible and visible" to students (p. 84). Good book racks are nice to have, but if that is not possible, books can be displayed so that students can see the covers. Allington also mentioned that teachers can encourage students to try books by keeping a few books on the desk and "bless[ing]" them with a short response to each and by providing some brief information about them (p. 85).

Text sets are effective for supplementing course text books, novels, and just about any other topic of classroom study (Tovani, 2004). Text sets are simply a collection of high interest, easily accessible reading materials that are compiled by teachers. Text sets can contain a wide variety of reading materials, including poetry, fiction and nonfiction, newspaper articles, photos, charts, maps, magazine articles and journals. I can also see an opportunity to build capacity for literacy when teachers work together to create text sets or simply share them. Electronic text sets may make it easy for teachers to store and add to high interest articles and other reads found online.

Increasing Reading Volume

Allington (2006) argued that increasing reading volume is the most important strategy for improving fluency and reading comprehension. He advocated for a change in the school's instructional environment to increase the amount of reading students do each day. Allington also pointed out that silent reading leads to more growth in reading comprehension than oral reading because students read fewer words when they read aloud and other students simply follow along, and there tends to be more interruptions. Read alouds are important and teachers often read aloud to model good reading, but there is evidence to suggest that silent reading time is important to increase reading volume. Because there is a large difference in the amount of reading high-achieving and low-achieving students do, increasing the amount of time teachers allot for in-class silent reading will help increase reading achievement for all students and will aid those who tend to read very little.

Allington (2006) stated that there are huge differences of opinion from one school to the next about the amount of silent reading time that is appropriate. This insight is confirmed by my own experience. Of the five different high schools I have worked in, only one school set aside time where all classes would partake in sustained silent reading. All of the other schools I have worked in have left silent reading time to the discretion of the classroom teacher. Allington, however, said that "the evidence available indicates that planning for volume of reading and writing may be necessary" (p. 41). He recommended that teachers restructure their teaching time so that ninety-minutes of the day can be set aside for reading. This means thinking carefully about how we make use of instructional time in order to "create plans that offer...reading volume" instead of just offering time

consuming activities that "fill up vast amounts of lesson time with activities other than reading" (p.48). Furthermore, the task of finding time for silent reading would be shared if teachers were to follow Allington's advice to enhance the curriculum of their classes with supplemental reading. He suggested that textbooks in Science and Social Studies classes "offer too little reading volume" and can be enhanced with fiction that fits into the curriculum (p. 49).

The school principal has a role to play in fostering an environment for silent reading. A significant amount of instructional time is lost through interruptions, from both students coming and going for special programs, as well as principals and counselors calling in to talk to students, public address system announcements, and in getting the students settled before a lesson and ready to leave at the end of the lesson. Allington (2006) suggested some strategies for principals to consider, such as moving programs such as Music and Drama to before or after the instructional day, and either cutting back on trivial public address system announcements or having them displayed to be read on hall monitors instead of read aloud, and maximizing the amount of instructional time in the day by having students arrive early and start to work when the bell rings and work until the bell rings for dismissal. Although his suggestions about maximizing instructional time make sense, I would suggest that Music and Drama also have instructional value. Rather than moving fine arts classes to less than optimal learning times, I would suggest finding opportunities to include literacy instruction in these classes as well.

From Teaching Content to Teaching Thinking

Tovani (2004) maintained that when teaching reading and comprehension, there is no "magic formula" (p. 17). In fact, strategies for improving literacy "can be used by any teacher, in any discipline" (p. 17). Nevertheless, there are some key ingredients of teaching reading comprehension:

- assessing reading materials and providing books that are interesting and at a range of appropriate reading levels
- teacher modeling comprehension and "fix-up strategies," and demonstrating how to "make sense of text" (Tovani, p.18).
- informing students of why they are reading something and how you would like them to use it
- Teaching students strategies to help them "hold their thinking" (Tovani, p. 18).

The most difficult part of teaching reading and comprehension skills is that in deciding to make time for it, teachers will have to reevaluate their reading materials and their current methods of instruction as well as the content they teach. Tovani (2004) advised that implementing thinking strategies and assignments is not possible if teachers are not willing to let go of some of the content that they so dutifully cover. The reality, however, is that teachers often feel the need to cover far too much material and not all of the learning is deep. I do agree with Tovani that much of this content could be pared down, and teachers and students can focus on more important course components and use thinking strategies to make the learning experience richer.

Tovani (2004) provided a definition of what she calls *a reading comprehension strategy*:

> A strategy is an intentional plan that is flexible and can be adapted to meet the demands of the situation. Strategies give readers options for thinking when reading words alone doesn't produce meaning (p. 5)

Proficient readers use a variety of skills when they read. They interact with the text and they are constantly asking themselves questions and making connections between what they are reading and themselves, their lived experiences, other books, movies and to many other things as well. When good readers lose comprehension, they are aware that they have lost this understanding and they use strategies to help them to repair it (p. 5). The goal is to teach students how to become "strategic readers" and to "help them become more thoughtful about their reading" (p. 9).

Cooper and White (2008) recognized the importance of teaching students *critical literacy skills*. The authors defined critical literacy as a connection between the reader and the world that is made through inquiry:

> Critical Literacy develops the capacity to read, linking the development of self-efficacy, an attitude of inquiry, and the desire to effect positive social change. Central to this is the notion of dialogue (p. 102).

After conducting a three-year action research project in a K-5 school, it was demonstrated that learning strategies can be employed to teach students critical literacy skills. Strategies used for teaching critical literacy were "text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world" (Miller, 2002, as cited in Cooper and White, p. 103). Text-to-self refers to how the reader reflects on and relates his or her "lived experience" with to the text (p. 103). Text-to-text refers to how the reader compares the text to others written on the subject. Text-to-world refers to how the reader can use the text to "make sense of the world" (p. 103). After first teaching students to make these connections, readers can begin to develop critical literacy skills:

> A final step in this process would help the reader to situate him/herself in relation to the world. In this way the reader develops greater understandings of him/herself, the world around him or her and his/her part in the construction of reality (p. 103).

The goal of teaching critical literacy is that students can begin to "understand the personal impact" and the "wider impact" that reading has "regarding the world community" (p. 106).

Moje (2008) argued that it is not productive to simply urge content teachers in secondary schools to teach literacy strategies; instead she proposed building "disciplinary literacy instructional programs" in which literacy instruction is specific to each subject area (p. 96). Her argument was that in order to successfully integrate literacy into each of the subject areas in secondary schools it is necessary to reexamine what learning and literacy looks like for each subject area.

Although scholars have recognized the importance of integrating literacy with each of the various subject areas, most secondary schools have been less than successful with this integration (Moje, 2008). Moje identified three "constraints on the integration of literacy instruction in the subject areas" (p. 97). Students have established beliefs and expectations about what secondary school classes look like. For example, students have firm ideas about the types of instruction that occur in Math class and English Language Arts class, in which classes they are expected to read and write, and in which classes they will simply absorb and recite content knowledge. Teachers have their own beliefs about the best way to teach the content of their subject areas. Some teachers are resistant to teaching literacy because they feel that they are not the English Language Arts teacher and therefore unqualified. Others feel that "what matters most is the content" (p. 98). Finally, the structure of secondary schools, with learning divided into separate subject

areas, makes it seem as though knowledge is somehow different from one subject to the next. Furthermore, with teachers teaching in isolation there is little chance to converse with teachers from other subject areas. Moje argued that the structure of secondary schools also suggests "that young people should simply march through the day open to information that will be offered in the most efficient manner possible," and that this invariably supports a "pedagogy of telling" and not necessarily student learning (p. 99).

Moje (2008) maintained that in order to build teacher capacity for the integration of literacy across the curriculum teachers must first reconceptualize learning and have a conversation about how each subject area requires students to interact with text in unique ways. Knowledge is also produced in unique ways in each discipline area and students can be active in learning by making and interrogating these knowledge claims. The function of literacy is to aid students in developing the critical thinking skills and fluency to question and communicate these new understandings. The role of teachers is to work with students to help them to "learn the literate practices required to make [learning in a subject area] meaningful" (p. 101). Moje also suggested that this view of learning should encourage students to use a wide variety of "representational forms" to communicate, create and synthesize knowledge, including reading and writing, oral language, music, art, and other forms (p. 99).

Moje (2008) provided a new way to look at the role of literacy in developing critical thinking skills:

> The focus moves away from accessing or generating texts only to obtain or produce information, toward an understanding of how texts represent both the knowledge and the ways of knowing, doing, and believing in different discourse communities (p. 103).

This author also highlighted the importance of careful planning through cross curricular teacher collaboration when developing school-wide literacy initiatives to ensure that literacy plans remain highly adaptable to the specific requirements of each subject area.

Comprehension Strategies

The purpose of this section of the literature review is to introduce some comprehension strategies that are designed for use in secondary school classrooms. I shared many of the instructional strategies discussed here with the members of Literacy Inquiry Team. Some of these instructional strategies were then integrated into our lesson plans.

Navigating Nonfiction Texts

Nonfiction texts can be challenging for students to read if they are not familiar with text features such as headings, glossaries, charts, text boxes, and picture captions (Gear, 2008). Gear suggested several strategies, which she called "zooming-in," to help students to become more aware of the structure of nonfiction texts and to use the text features to help them to locate information (p. 50). Gear began with lessons that simply ask students to identify the features of nonfiction texts. For example, students are asked to identify the specific features of a book, to think about the usefulness of these features, and to share their thinking with a partner. Students can also compare fiction and nonfiction texts using a *Venn Diagram*. Students can create a dictionary of nonfiction text features to help them to "see how features can represent information in a different way" (p. 53).

Questions and Inferences

Gear (2008) suggested that encouraging students to ask questions helps them to think deeply and provides a better understanding of text and the world. Students also build confidence in themselves when they know that their thinking matters. Gear explained that the objective is to encourage and value questions as they are "the catalyst for learning in all subject areas, not just reading" (p. 64).

Gear (2008) linked the instruction of strategies for questioning and inferring as "questions that require the reader to think beyond a literal understanding" (p. 64). She added that questions "are a direct pathway to inferring" (p. 64). Good readers ask questions when they read and when answers cannot be found in the text, they use their ideas to make inferences. Gear introduced several strategies to promote what she called "deep-thinking questioning" and inferring (p. 64).

Students can be taught that there are different levels of questioning. For example, one strategy is to have students create a chart that compares "quick questions" to "deep-thinking questions," and then follow up this activity with a class discussion (Gear, 2008 p. 65). Deep-thinking questions can be encouraged through activities such as journaling. Gear suggested that students can practice their deep-thinking and questioning skills by creating *Wonder Notebooks*. *Wonder Notebooks* use an open-ended format and students are encouraged to write questions, make drawings, and record observations (p. 67). Although Gear explains that this strategy is particularly useful for Science, I anticipate that this strategy might be useful in any subject area.

Other strategies Gear (2008) introduced that promote deep-thinking include *Wonder Webs* and a strategy called *Questions and Discoveries*. The *Wonder Web* strategy

has several steps. First, students work in partners to brainstorm a list of things they already know about a subject and then they generate a list of things they are wondering about. Next, the teacher models the web strategy by creating a web of shared questions on chart paper. Finally, each student creates his or her own *Wonder Web* using questions he or she has generated about the topic. *The Questions and Discoveries* lesson also asks students to brainstorm what they know and what they are wondering. This time, however, questions are charted as a class followed by a discussion of ways in which students might search for answers to the questions. Each student then chooses two questions to pursue and records their questions and discoveries on a form. One of the objectives of the lesson is to demonstrate "how questions can lead to discoveries" (p. 69). Students also learn that having questions gives them a purpose for reading.

The *OWI* strategy breaks down the process of inferring into three parts: observing, wondering and inferring. When students first learn to use this strategy, they use a chart to list the things they observe about an image before moving on to generate questions and inferences. For example, students can work in groups to examine a photograph and work to generate and record observations about what they can literally see, and then create deep-thinking questions and inferences. After each group reports out to the class, there is discussion and new questions and inferences are recorded on the bottom of the chart. Eventually, students can generate charts to record just their deep-thinking questions and their inferences about these questions.

The *OWI* strategy can be adapted for use with text by replacing the "observe" heading with "text says..." (Gear, 2008, p. 78). The process is similar in that students begin by recording what they know, or in this case, the information they derive from a

literal reading, and then move on to create deep-thinking questions and inferences. Gear suggested that the teacher use plenty of modeling and guided practice to show students how to use this strategy. Students will sometimes ask irrelevant questions and might need extra guidance and practice with asking deep and purposeful questions.

Selecting Important Ideas

Learning how to make decisions about which information is most important and how to quickly find and summarize the main idea of a piece of text are vital skills for reading nonfiction texts (Gear, 2008). *THIEVES*, which is an acronym for Title, Headings, Introduction, Every first sentence, Visuals, Ending, and So what?, is a simple strategy that teaches students where to look for important information. The final letter – S – of the "So what?" stage is "the most important letter" as it asks students to summarize the most important ideas found in the reading (p. 91). Gear maintained that this strategy can also be used as a pre-reading activity as it helps students to preview a text and quickly get a good idea of what the reading is about before they begin. Although not all books follow the same structure, and therefore *THIEVES* might not be the best acronym for every book, I anticipate that teachers could adapt this strategy by developing acronyms that work for specific texts in their subject area.

Key Words is another strategy that might be useful for secondary school teachers. Gear (2008) suggested that the classroom teacher create an anchor chart on key words, explaining that key words "are connected to the topic", "repeated in the title, headings, or text", "help you visualize", and "help[s] you remember an important idea"(p. 97). Students are given a short piece of nonfiction text to read, and working in partners, they are to compile a list of three key words. When students are finished making their

selections, students share their selections with the class. The lesson continues with a class discussion about how students made their choices. Teachers can extend the lesson by asking students to use their key words to write a short summary of the reading.

Gear (2008) suggested a strategy called *Listen, Sketch, Label, Summarize* as an effective way to teach students to create "mental images of key ideas" and to "filter out details and remember important points" (pp. 100, 101). The classroom teacher reads a section of an article aloud to the class twice and with each reading the students are asked to perform a different task. First, students simply listen and visualize. On the second reading, the teacher pauses to allow students to make very quick sketches of their visual images. Students are asked to label their sketches with key words, and then with a partner, to try to remember as much of the article as they can using their sketches and key words to assist their recall. The lesson concludes with students writing a short summary of the article.

Making Connections

Gear (2008) provided several connection building strategies that could easily be adapted for use with secondary school students. The *My Knew-New Connections* strategy teaches students to "pay attention to their thinking" by stopping to record what they already know and what they learned on sticky notes and "flagging the place on the page" (p. 116). When students have finished reading and flagging connections, they remove the sticky notes and place them in a chart with two headings that are labeled "I Knew This Already" and "This is New To Me" (pp. 116, 120). Next, students are asked to work with the *New* and *Knew* facts to answer a question or summarize the reading.

Gear (2008) recommended creating a chart that will assist students in identifying types of connections and guide them with a simple set of codes that they can use to show these connections (p. 118). These connections and codes are "Text-to Self," (T-S) "Text-to-Text" (T-T), and "Text-to-World" (T-W) (p. 118). The teacher models the use of this strategy by doing a "read-aloud/think-aloud" and stopping to share his or her connections and codes (p. 119). Students are then asked to try this strategy, reading and recording their connections using codes written on sticky notes. Gear suggested that teachers begin by using text that "invites students to make many connections" so students can ease their way into learning this new strategy (p. 119).

Synthesis and Transforming Thought

Gear (2008) made the point that reading is not just about finding the answers that are nestled inside the pages of a book, but rather "opening yourself up to the possibilities that a book can change the way you think" (p. 126). When a reader's thinking is transformed, he or she is able to see things differently. Gear suggested that synthesis is the key to transforming thinking:

> Synthesizing combines awareness and understanding on all levels – it is the summary of text, combined with the reader's connections, questions, and inferences, to formulate a new perspective. While a summary is a retelling of someone else's ideas, a synthesis is a "rethinking" of your own (p. 124).

Gear (2008) provided a strategy for encouraging students to synthesize their reactions and transform their thinking, using books that are not "dense with facts but that evoke a big reaction from the reader" (p. 127). Books about issues such as global warming and animal extinction are possibilities. As the teacher reads aloud from a book, he or she models the thinking process by recording facts on the left-hand side of a chart and reactions to these facts on the right. Next, students record their own facts and

reactions on their own charts as the teacher continues to read aloud. Once students have had an opportunity to share their reactions with a partner, students are asked to use their facts and reactions to write a new "transformed thought" on the bottom of their charts (p. 128). Students then share their transformed thoughts with the class.

Another strategy is called *How My Thinking Changes* (Gear, 2008). This strategy asks students to compare their thinking before reading to their thinking after they have completed reading. Students are asked to share their thoughts about a topic with a partner, and then to record their thoughts on paper. Next, students are asked to record questions they have about the topic and to share with partners. After questions are shared, students read a selection about the topic. Last, students are asked how their thinking has changed after completing the reading. Students share their responses with partners and then write their ideas on paper.

Pre-reading Strategies

An *Anticipation Guide* (Readence, 1986, as cited in Hume, 2008) is a way to activate students' prior knowledge and general interest in a topic before reading. The teacher prepares several controversial statements that are related to the reading. Students are asked to think about these statements, and as they are reading, to "converse or argue with the author" (p. 142). An *Anticipation Guide* helps students to more actively engage with the text and helps students read with purpose.

Another way to access prior knowledge and to pique student interest before reading is to have students create graphic organizers such as *Venn diagrams* and charts for comparing and contrasting. After introducing a new topic, students are asked to compare and contrast new ideas or assumptions with something they have already studied

or read. Graphic organizers help students to access prior knowledge and connect their knowledge to new concepts related to the reading material. It is anticipated that after working with graphic organizers students will read with greater purpose and "think more deeply" (Hume, 2008, p. 144).

Student self-assessments can be used to give students and teachers a better understanding of whether students have adequate background knowledge or sufficient interest in a topic before reading. Hume (2008) described several activities that could be adapted for any subject area. The *Four-Corners Activity* asks students to stand in the corner of the room that indicates which topic they are most interested in or have the most knowledge about. An alternative to this strategy is the *Five Finger Assessment*, where students are asked to raise a number of fingers to indicate their knowledge or interest in a topic. Students can also rate, prioritize a list, or create a graph such as a bar or pie chart of topics according to interest and background knowledge.

The *KWL* strategy asks students to write about or record what they know, want to know, and have learned about a topic. Hume (2008) suggested that this can be used as a pre-reading strategy to help students identify background knowledge and to build a sense of inquiry. Furthermore, because it provides a snapshot of what students already know about a topic as well and what students are most curious about learning, the *KWL* strategy can be useful in helping teachers to refine content and design units. With *KWL*, reading is active because students approach the reading with questions in mind. After students have completed the reading, *KWL* provides students with an opportunity to transform their thinking when they are asked to return to their initial questions and write about what they have learned.

Quickwrites and *Quickdraws* are other strategies for accessing prior knowledge and getting students prepared to read new material. Hume (2008) suggested that teachers put short time limits on freewriting or freedrawing activities (five minutes or less) and stress to students the importance of a detailed response rather than accurate spelling and grammar. She also noted that these brief periods for writing or sketching and labeling can be a good opportunity for students to practice using key vocabulary terms in their writing.

Teaching Students to Read With Purpose

Tovani (2004) suggested that students read much more thoughtfully when they are given a purpose for reading. She pointed out that readers use two different inner reading voices, depending on their level of comprehension: they use a "reciting voice" when they are not engaged in the reading, and are simply decoding the text with little understanding of what they are reading, and they use a "conversation voice" when they are engaged in the reading and are working at constructing meaning (p. 62). When students are given a purpose for reading they learn to turn their recital voices off and their conversation voices on as they work to build understanding.

The role of the teacher is to help students to read with "a result in mind" (Tovani 2004, p. 65). Tovani introduced several strategies that help students to focus their reading, including *double-entry journals*, and *comprehension constructors*. The objective of using these tools is to "pull the students through a comprehension process," to help them to reveal their thinking of how they connect the reading to their previous knowledge and also to reveal where students are struggling to comprehend vocabulary and ideas (p. 77). Through teacher modeling, students can also be taught to mark text with

highlighters, pens, and sticky notes, to reveal their thoughts, questions and connections to what they are reading.

Group Work

Because in any class there is a wide range of reading abilities, arranging the class into small groups for a portion of their instruction is a good idea. Hume (2008) suggested that although friendships are "critically important" to young adolescents, it is important that students learn to form groups based on interest in a topic (p. 108). Furthermore, it is important that groups not be arranged by reading ability but rather to build flexible groups with diverse learners. Tovani (2004) stated that the advantages of small group instruction are many. She suggested that small group instruction promotes sharing connections to reading, stimulates thinking, builds social skills, promotes deeper learning, teaches students to listen, and encourages all learners, regardless of reading ability, to be part of a team.

Having students work in groups also makes it possible for a class to explore a wider range of books through literature circles (Daniels, 2002). Using literature circles, there can be five or six novels studied by small groups at any one time. Tovani (2004) added that students also learn to be more accountable to their reading teams when they are given specific tasks, such as the chart maker, or the prompter, or the student in charge of finding wonderful uses of language in the text. Literature circles offer more choice for readers than the traditional novel study in which the whole class reads the same book.

Tovani (2004) suggested that there is potential for improvement in the thoughtfulness of writing assignments when students are given opportunities to discuss connections in groups, brainstorm ideas, and share in the planning process before they sit

down to do the actual writing. Tovani added that this process is richer if students have had the chance to work first on their own, building meaning through some of the other strategies, such as double-entry journals and comprehension constructors, and then bringing their learning back to the group to be shared. The building of meaning and insight takes time and having students engaged in a process where they build it, share it, and continue to add to it, helps to make reading more thoughtful.

Differentiation

Hume (2008) suggested that choice is especially important to adolescent learners because they are at a vulnerable age when their self-concept is shifting and many are particularly concerned about finding peer approval. Furthermore, young adolescents are experiencing many changes in their physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and moral development. Adolescence is "dynamic" and with "every aspect of each student's development on an individual timetable, diversity is inevitable" (p. 39). Differentiated instruction offers a framework for maximizing learning for every student by meeting the diverse learning needs, styles, interests, and learning preferences of each student in the classroom.

Hume (2008) described four types of learners: those who prefer to experiment, those who are more practical and factual, learners who prefer research and ideas, and lastly, learners who are more feeling and imaginative. Students who are more experimental learn best when "given a variety of challenging hands-on and open-ended activities" (p. 65). These students perform better when there is plenty of choice and learning suffers when they are told specifically what to do and tasks are repetitive and "don't permit exploration or discovery" (p. 65). Students whose learning style is more

practical and straightforward excel when directions are detailed and clear and activities are predictable and emphasize problem solving. Students with a practical learning style do not work as well when there is little direction and when the task requires them to "take risks and try new approaches" (p. 65). Students who prefer research and working with ideas do better when they have plenty of time to deeply explore a topic and have "access to a wide range of expert resources" (p. 65). Hume added that these students do not perform well when activities require them to explore emotions rather than logic and working with others can be problematic. On the other hand, students who are more feeling and imaginative work well with others and enjoy activities that encourage seeing the perspectives of others and discussing "opinions and beliefs" (p. 65). For these students, working alone can be difficult and competition from peers can make learning difficult.

In addressing a wide range of learning styles, Hume (2008) maintained that activities also need to meet the needs of visual, auditory, and tactile or kinesthetic learners. Visual learners prefer watching videos or reading to access new information. They also benefit from activities such as drawing, creating mind maps, and using graphic organizers when they are working with new information. Auditory learners do well when lessons are delivered orally through lecture or audio recordings. Auditory learners prefer class discussions and other activities such as reader's theatre and debates. Tactile/kinesthetic learners learn new information best if there is opportunity to move about and experience learning by doing puzzles, using manipulatives, playing games, and going on field trips.

Hume (2008) pointed out that most teachers are visual learners and that is a challenge to meet the needs of tactile/kinesthetic learners. Nevertheless, she suggested teachers incorporate some activities that involve physical movement, such as tossing a ball to review material, or moving to a corner of the room that represents an opinion on a topic. Teachers can also ensure that classroom furnishings are comfortable or that students have the opportunity to recline on pillows when reading. Hume added that it is helpful if tactile/kinesthetic students learn to "physically interact with their textbooks" using sticky notes and other methods of marking text (p. 68).

Students will also have specific intelligence preferences; meeting these needs will require teachers to offer many choices in student assignments (Hume, 2008). Verbal-linguistic learners will prefer writing assignments such as stories, essays, poems and speeches. Logical-mathematical learners will prefer a choice of charts, graphs, and other ways to problem solve. Visual-spacial learners will benefit from assignments that allow them to create visual presentations such as multimedia slide shows, maps, and drawings. Bodily-kinesthetic learners prefer assignments that are more hands-on, such as role plays and building models. Musical-rhythmic learners like to demonstrate their learning through activities such as songs and choral reading. Students with interpersonal intelligence preferences can choose to conduct interviews or organize activities and events. Intrapersonal preferences are best met with assignments that encourage journaling and making "statements of personal belief" (p. 77). Naturalistic learners will excel at assignments that will allow them to classify and compare ideas and objects and create "displays or exhibitions of artifacts" (p. 77).

Knowing what students are interested in helps teachers to make learning relevant and meaningful. Furthermore, it helps the teacher to identify a student's strengths, intelligence preferences, and learning style. Hume (2008) suggested several activities for students to share their interests with the class, such as sharing "three objects that represent their interests," or choosing a library book and explaining "to the class why it is worth reading" (p. 79). She also provided a student interest inventory that surveys students about their interests, talents and strengths.

Choice is the most important aspect of the differentiated classroom. Hume (2008) stated that "if differentiated instruction were a wheel, choice would be the hub" (p. 49). Students can be offered choices in reading materials, groups to work with, daily activities and assignments. Hume cautioned that students "don't need to be offered choice all the time" but when it is beneficial (p. 107). She also cautioned that "unlimited choice is overwhelming for students," and maintained that it is better to limit the number of options "after students have learned how to make choices" (p. 107). For example, a teacher can begin by offering only two very specific choices for an assignment, providing criteria or examples of exemplary work, and insisting that students produce quality work. Once students have had experience with choosing assignments, the number of choices can be expanded to a "maximum of six choices" (p. 107).

Intervention Programs

Allington (2006) argued that interventions are just as important for struggling high school readers as they are for struggling elementary school readers. For many students, development as readers comes to a stalemate in the middle school years. There is a case to be made for intensive remedial programs run by highly trained learning

assistance teachers, as well as other levels of reading intervention that are taught by the regular classroom teacher. The level of intervention and the specific program that is required will vary depending on the needs of the students. Allington pointed to several strategies for supporting students, such as enhanced access to appropriate reading materials; accelerated literacy development strategies, including classroom based reading, thinking improvement models, and intensive remedial programs; and literacy interventions in classes that historically have focused on delivering content.

There are other interventions that might be considered, although they should not be intended to take the place of quality classroom instruction or intensive remedial literacy support. If the objective of the intervention is simply to increase the volume of reading, then a program might be implemented at a convenient time (during lunch hour, tutorial time, or after school) for this purpose. Allington (2006) mentioned the use of community volunteers, college students, and even responsible senior students as tutors for such programs. Programs such as *Reading Buddies*, an after-school reading program run by community volunteers, can be quite effective, so long as volunteer tutors are given adequate training, supervision, and support (Invernizzi, as cited in Allington, p. 160). The key to the success of these programs that operate outside of the classroom or the instructional day is that they are guided by the same principles as other effective literacy intervention programs; there is "access to appropriate texts, access to powerful, personalized instruction," and there is "opportunity to select the sorts of texts to be read" (p. 163).

Building Capacity for Literacy

Paterson (2007) argued that efforts to improve student literacy are more successful if teachers are working together. Literacy must be "a shared responsibility" and "students need to see that everything is connected and reading and writing are not just for English class" (p. 12). Allington (2006) pointed out that "struggling readers need good instruction all day long" (p. 152). What are needed are some strategies for bringing teachers together to discuss literacy and some strategies that can easily be implemented to improve it.

Stoll (2009) defined capacity as "a power – a habit of mind focused on engaging in and sustaining the learning of people at all levels of the educational system for the collective purpose of enhancing student learning in its broadest sense" (p. 125). She saw capacity building as complex, "involving both those internally and those supporting them externally," and suggested we rethink ineffective methods of school improvement (p. 125). Top-down and prescribed methods of change are ineffective because they diminish capacity and lead to "teacher dependency" and negative feelings (p. 118). Seed (2005) agreed, stating that a "tightly controlled curriculum" and prescriptive agendas lead to a "de-professionalization of teaching" (p. 1). Prescribed change also does not work because schools have specific challenges and needs. Real capacity to create and sustain improvements to teaching and learning comes from a culture of "informed professionalism – where school leaders and other staff have a greater role in determining how change should occur" (Stoll, p. 118). Stoll added that capacity building is "contextual" and will vary from one school to the next (p. 118).

Stoll (2009) suggested that capacity building needs to go beyond improving teaching and focus more on student learning. She saw the importance of moving away from traditional learning outcomes and focusing on the learning process itself. Building capacity for instructional improvement requires more than just convincing other teachers to try innovative teaching strategies in an effort to help students to meet learning outcomes. Deep student learning involves more than teaching content knowledge and "capacity building for this wider agenda pays much greater attention to what is known about learning" (p. 119). Student wellbeing, peer relationships, and student voice are important aspects of learning that are sometimes overlooked, as is the use of technology in learning (p. 119).

Although identifying promising practices and transferring this knowledge to the classrooms is often the focus of capacity building, Stoll (2009) maintained that this is not the best approach. Schools are "varied and differentiated" and "existing models of schooling may not meet" the needs of today's learners (p. 120). Due to the effect that technologies have on the process of learning, students today have a much different orientation than students from past generations. Stoll suggested that in order to meet the learning needs of today's students as well as tomorrow's students, "capacity building needs to address both the present and the future" (p. 121). This means that teachers might consider a balanced approach between focusing on standards and promoting student innovation and creativity. Stoll cites Hannon, who uses the term "next practice" to identify "emergent innovations that could open up new ways of working" (p. 121). In developing capacity for next practice, teachers are encouraged to take a "different,

creative, exploratory, risk taking and adaptive orientation" that will help develop a better foundation for learners today and in the future (p. 121).

Sustainable improvement is only possible when staff members believe in continuously improving teaching and learning, they are motivated to make changes happen, and they possess the necessary skills (Stoll, 2009). Capacity "power[s] the sustainability journey" when staff members continue to reflect on what is working and what needs improving, and through "conversations inside and outside the school" they develop ways to improve learning (p. 121). Stoll explained that "ensuring sustainability depends on a capacity building state of mind":

> As any new improvement is considered, the response should be 'what do we need to put in place to ensure we have the capacity for this to be sustainable?'(p. 121).

Capacity for change is strongest when leadership is distributed (Stoll, 2009). The role of the principal is not to prescribe change but to spot "leadership potential" and "develop leadership practice and interactions" (p. 122). Stoll suggested a leadership team approach to capacity building with the goal of improving learning for students but also "provid[ing] the conditions, environment and opportunities for their colleagues to be creative" (p. 122). This idea of developing lateral capacity for improvement was supported by Seed (2005) who saw teacher empowerment as an important factor in school improvement. When teachers feel empowered they are encouraged "to take risks and new roles," experiment with fresh approaches and ideas, and take part in school improvement teams and action research (p. 2). The role of the school principal is also to "do things that empower teachers," such as provide assistance with scheduling and staffing and encourage teachers to be part of decision making teams (p. 2). Irvin, Meltzer, Dean and Mickler (2010) added that the school principal can add "importance and

stature" in recognizing the improvement teams' successes (p. 114). Furthermore, it was suggested that these public recognitions are "important if there is a need for recruitment of individuals to join the team" (p. 114).

Allington (2006) also supported the building of capacity through teacher teams. He maintained that remedial support programs should not take the place of good teaching in every classroom. He felt that all teachers could improve how they teach literacy, without spending money on ineffective commercial reading programs and without special computers and software packages. Instead, Allington supported the idea of teachers working together to help each other improve the quality of their teaching. He gave several suggestions for how teachers can build capacity for literacy and take charge of their own professional development.

Professional reading groups, or TAPERs (Teachers as Professional Education Readers) are an improvement strategy designed to get teachers together to talk about professional readings (Allington, 2006). Professional reading is also good professional development and is much more engaging than the one day "talking head workshop approach to professional development" (p. 143). As members of a reading group, teachers from a wide range of curriculum areas can have a conversation about literacy. Furthermore, the setting is relaxed, the readings tend to be short, relevant, and accessible, and there is no pressure to implement the ideas, just simply to share thoughts on helping students to improve their reading and writing. The goal is create an opportunity for teachers to work together to discuss methods of more effective teaching.

TIPS (Teacher Inquiry Projects) are teams of teachers that are working together to explore ways to improve their teaching (Allington, 2006). TIPS are more action oriented

than TAPERS in that teachers that are part of the inquiry project have moved beyond conversations about teaching literacy and are now formulating a plan for improving it. Once again, building capacity for change is central to the success of TIPS and one can easily see how much more effective a literacy improvement initiative might be if there are a wide range of devoted teachers on the team.

Allington (2006) stated that there is a strong connection between professional conversations and student success and that teachers who are seldom involved in professional conversations struggle "in the efforts to meet the needs of struggling readers (p. 147). Professional conversations are an important part of learning communities, for it is through these conversations that expertise is shared with others. Furthermore, conversations give teachers a better sense of how students are doing in each other's classes and when teachers work together, they can create a more comprehensive action plan to assist students. If schools have time for professional conversation built into the instructional day, it is possible for members of TAPERS and TIPS to share thoughts and success stories around literacy improvement with a much wider audience of teachers, and perhaps some may choose to initiate new practices in their classrooms. The first step to "serv[ing] all children better" is "enhancing the frequency and usefulness of the professional conversations in your school" (p. 148).

Mednick (2004) also saw the potential of using teacher inquiry teams and book study teams. Although they can be effective groups to help build knowledge and capacity for improving literacy, she pointed to the importance of implementing a flexible literacy plan across the school that is meaningful for each of the teachers. Staff development on how to use comprehension strategies might not be enough to ensure that a school-wide

literacy initiative will be effective. Without making the literacy initiative meaningful for individual teachers and learners, and without adequate support from teachers who know how to use instructional strategies, some teachers will remain uncomfortable and unwilling to implement the initiative. On the other hand, if teachers from each of the various subject areas have support and guidance in creating their own strategies instead of just implementing those that are created by an inquiry team, then the learning will be "more connected to their classes" (p. 8) Mednick suggested that a literacy coach might be an effective way of supporting teachers who are willing to make instructional changes.

Irvin, Meltzer, Dean, and Mickler (2010) developed a five-stage process to guide literacy leadership teams in developing and implementing a literacy improvement initiative. The process includes building a literacy leadership team, assessing the school's capacity for literacy improvement and identifying areas where improvements can be made, creating a detailed action plan, implementing the literacy plan and monitoring its progress, and creating a plan to make positive changes sustainable.

In stage one of the literacy leadership process, members of the school community establish a literacy leadership team and "built a data-driven vision for a culture of literacy" (Irvin, Meltzer, Dean & Mickler, 2010, p. 8). The authors optimistically maintained that this vision "will inspire the entire school" to be part of the initiative (p. 9). It was suggested that the literacy leadership team have "8 to 12 members" and representation "balanced by role in the school" and include teachers from various grade levels and content areas, an administrator, support personnel, as well as students (p. 40). Irvin, Meltzer, Dean and Mickler outlined some general criteria for selecting teachers for the literacy leadership team. Candidates for the literacy leadership team are "strong

proponents of literacy," they are "considered by their peers to be school leaders," they are "comfortable inviting colleagues into their classrooms during instruction," and they have "demonstrated interest in participating in study groups or other professional development activities" (p. 40).

Someone can be chosen as the team leader; however, the authors also pointed out the benefits of sharing the leadership role with others on the team. They stated that "shared leadership can build the capacity and strengthen the impact of the literacy team" (Irvin, Meltzer, Dean & Mickler, 2010, p. 41). In this stage of the literacy leadership process, members of the team clarify "roles and expectations" for implementing literacy improvements, "examine and discuss beliefs about literacy and learning," and "communicate the professional development opportunities" that will enhance skills and knowledge about literacy and learning (p. 46). Lastly, the literacy leadership team reviews the latest reading and writing assessments given in the school and creates a "data overview" of the school's "strengths and challenges...relative to literacy and learning" (p. 49). The goal is to establish baseline data and to discuss the need for literacy and learning improvement.

In the second stage of the literacy leadership process, the team uses a set of *literacy action rubrics* to assess the "school's capacity to support systemic literacy development" (Irvin, Meltzer, Dean & Mickler, 2010, p. 9). There are five rubrics that were developed by the authors. Rubric one assesses "student motivation, engagement, and achievement" (p. 14). Rubric two assesses "literacy across the content areas" (p. 15). Rubric three "describes the components of a successful intervention program" to support students who struggle with reading and writing (p. 16). Rubric four outlines the

"components essential for creating a literacy-rich environment," including "the school's culture, environment, policies, and support structures" (p. 17). Rubric five helps the literacy leadership team to assess the level of "parent and community support for literacy activities at the school" (p. 18). The literacy leadership team uses the results of each of these assessments to initiate conversation about literacy and learning and to guide them in creating measureable "literacy action goals" (p. 63). The authors stated that creating literacy action goals is a crucial part of the school improvement plan:

> This step is important because developing clear, measureable, and feasible goals for progress is critical to an effective school improvement plan. Without clearly defined goals, it is impossible to determine if growth is being made, where additional attention is needed, and what might be the most productive action steps to take (p. 63).

In stage three, the literacy leadership team develops a detailed plan called *implementation map*s, which include timelines, identifies who will take the lead in each part of the plan, states what resources will be needed, and provides specifics of the plan as well measures of success. Before plans are finalized, the team asks for feedback from the school community, which includes faculty who are not on the literacy team, parents, and senior administration. In stage four, the literacy leadership team "brand[s] the literacy initiative" by writing a catchy statement (Irvin, Meltzer, Dean & Mickler, 2010, p. 81). Branding the literacy initiative helps to "give the initiative an identity" and serves as "a constant reminder of the work being done" (p. 81). Next, the literacy leadership team plans a "school-wide literacy kickoff" to "build enthusiasm" in the literacy initiative (p. 83). The authors suggested scheduling "an interactive keynote address to the faculty" about the importance of literacy and including members of the literacy leadership team as "co-presenters with any outside presenters" (p. 84). The kickoff is also a time to

introduce the faculty to the brand statement, describe how the implementation maps will be set into action and monitored, and to share specific literacy instructional strategies with faculty members. After the kickoff, the literacy initiative is implemented and carefully monitored so members of the literacy leadership team can assess their progress and introduce "actions needed to deepen or sustain the work" (p. 89). The implementation plan is data driven and team members are responsible for collecting and analyzing "the kinds of data...outlined in each implementation map as measures of success" (p. 92). This data might come from both teachers and students and can include a variety of data sources such as teacher and student surveys, student work, and classroom visits.

In the fifth and final stage of the literacy leadership process, which takes place at the end of the school year, the literacy leadership team returns to the literacy action rubrics they used in stage one. Members of the team use the rubrics to rate "their perception of the school's current implementation" and provide evidence gathered during the school year to support their decisions (Irvin, Meltzer, Dean & Mickler, 2010, p. 106). Team members share their perceptions and try to "come to consensus about the school's current literacy practice" (p. 106). The team then creates a summary chart of each literacy action goal to document the kinds of data they have and to summarize "what the data and evidence reaveal[s]" (p. 107). Finally, the team decides if they have met the goal. If they have, then the team documents the things that they did that "directly supported success" (p. 107). If the goal was not met, then the team decides if it is necessary to revise the goal for the following year and summarizes any revisions. Collaboration, planning, and careful

implementation, followed by reflection and revision, are the key components of the literacy leadership process.

Mednick (2004) also stated that collaboration with peers is the most effective way to begin the process of improving instruction and learning. He also argued that it is best to move away from workshops and strategic initiatives and begin the process of change by first building an environment where teachers feel comfortable sharing with colleagues. In fact, before making any plans at all "it is critical for a school to cultivate a community of learners where risks can be taken" (p. 3). This means that teachers must feel safe in sharing what is going well and what needs improvement before moving on to implement changes:

> As teachers feel less threatened and more comfortable with sharing their work, they gradually become willing to try new strategies and reflect on how it went (p. 3).

The goal of the team is to create a culture of learning which "allow[s] everyone to get smarter and more reflective together" (p. 3).

Cooper and White (2008) maintained that school-wide efforts to implement a literacy program requires "planning, a collaborative effort and, perhaps most significantly, teachers committed to making it happen" (p. 106). The authors also discussed several other things to consider when developing a school-wide literacy plan, which I have listed in Figure 2.

Mednick (2004) suggested that some teachers have been able to become more reflective about their own teaching practices after watching their colleagues teach. Peer observations can be a useful way for teachers to learn "more strategies [and] more ideas," but more importantly, peer observations provide teachers with opportunities to reflect on

and discuss learning and teaching (p. 4). Peer observations can be made more useful if teachers begin the observation by agreeing on an observational focus question and they record their observations and reflections using a focused protocol such as a double-entry journal.

1. Vision of literacy as a school-wide focus with all teachers sharing in this vision.
2. Getting community onside
3. Making sure everyone is part of the project
4. Focusing on the foundation pieces first
5. Providing support along the way with resources and training
6. Timetable and staffing (consider additional support staff and Literacy blocks
7. Ongoing process of review
8. Listening to the staff and following through on staff needs
9. Data-driven program
10. Implementation processes are safeguarded from waning enthusiasm with plans and procedures
11. Review of the school-wide focus after the first year
12. Identify the positives (what is working?)
13. Identify the challenges (what are the ongoing questions?)
14. Consider the future of the program in subsequent years
15. Sharing the "vision of school reform through literacy action research" (Cooper & White, p. 108).

Figure 2. Things to consider in developing a school-wide literacy program, from Cooper and White (2008, p. 108).

Open lab systems "where teachers open their classrooms to groups of colleagues from the school" is another way for teams of teachers to observe examples of teaching (Mednick, 2004, p. 5). This strategy allows many teachers to watch the lesson simultaneously, providing opportunities for a team of teachers to observe, reflect, and debrief together. The observed teacher also has an opportunity "to receive feedback from colleagues in a structured format" (p. 5). Mednick pointed out that "the purpose was not to evaluate but to learn and develop their practice" (p. 6). The importance of first establishing a safe and supportive learning community is clear.

Paterson (2007) suggested that teachers, and especially content area teachers, need to be reminded about the importance of literacy. He added that the key is helping teachers understand how infusing literacy instruction can help students learn the content and develop critical thinking skills. Paterson identified several ways to infuse literacy instruction in various content areas, including using novels to teach health-related issues in the health sciences, encouraging students to read about physical activities or sports statistics in physical education classes, and to read about "the history of a musical instrument or ...read reviews about contemporary music" in music classes (pp. 13, 14). The objective is to deepen student learning and provide opportunities for "students to see how reading and writing skills are applicable to all content areas and in real life" (Fish, as cited in Paterson, p. 12).

Paterson (2007) showcased the importance of school-wide efforts to improve student literacy: Marshall Middle School in Wexford, Pennsylvania built student book clubs, encouraged student book talks, and invited authors to visit and speak to students. Other schools have developed school-wide efforts to increase student vocabulary and to incorporate blocks of silent reading time into the instructional day. Homeroom teachers at Twelve Corner Middle School in Rochester, New York shared the responsibility of teaching about issues such as bullying by reading aloud from books and following up with class discussion.

Learning Communities

Mitchell and Sackney (2009) maintained that learning communities are key to the improvement of educational systems that "require considerable reconstruction" (p. 17). Although teachers must work inside the constraints of class time and class size and the

provincial or state Ministry of Education decides the curriculum that is to be taught, teachers themselves have the power to make learning deep and meaningful. When something is not working, for instance, if "learning objectives" are not "connected to [students'] lives or aligned with their interests" or if students simply are not learning despite pressures from school, district, or government, then teachers can work together to renew the system and make teaching and learning meaningful for students (p. 9). If schools are to improve, then it will be up to teachers to work together to move from "a traditional deficit model" that labels kids as having "deficiencies" to be corrected, to a "capacity-building model" where teachers work as a community to respond with a variety of teaching approaches aimed at the unique needs and interests of learners (p. 10).

This idea of building a learning community by building capacity was supported by Cooper and White (2008). In a study of an Ontario school that was conducting teacher initiated action research to improve literacy, they highlighted the importance of having a community focus on school improvement. The school's staff drafted a document called "A Commitment to Literacy" which listed the responsibilities of all members of the learning community in ensuring that students could be successful (p. 106). All stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, and the school principal made a commitment to "build and celebrate literacy for self and others and to be accountable for achievements of higher levels of literacy" ("Commitment to Literacy," 2001, as cited in Cooper and White, p. 106).

Mitchell and Sackney (2009) also had much to say about deep learning and the role educators play in making it sustainable. Although the traditional view is that there is a best way for kids to learn and teachers to deliver instruction, or what Mitchell and

Sackney called the "clock-work view of schooling," schools that are building capacity for deeper learning aim to tap into the "rich foundation of experiences, information, and capacities" of both students and teachers (pp.10,11). They argued that "teaching and learning are not standard, homogeneous processes, and educational outcomes consequently should not be imposed, canonized, standardized, or micromanaged," but rather we should celebrate the wide variety of learners and teachers and the opportunities they present to make learning exciting (p. 11). When teachers work together to create and share in teaching practices that lead to deeper learning, a positive effect on both teachers and their relationships with students can be expected; there is a "spirit of encouragement and support" that puts "learning at the center of every activity" (p. 19).

There is a tremendous difference between high and low capacity schools. Mitchell and Sackney (2009) made the distinction between "managed" systems and a "living" system (p. 22). The traditional school is heavily managed by school principals that make top down decisions and learning and teaching is often "mechanized" and "standardized" (p. 22). On the other hand, schools that operate as high capacity learning communities are more "organic" in that teachers and principals and others in the community are working in concert to make learning "generative, meaningful, and individualized" (pp. 22,23). They also identified seven characteristics of high capacity schools. These characteristics are listed in Figure 3.

High capacity schools are also full of teacher leaders who are sensitive to their surroundings, including the individual needs of learners as well as the needs of other teachers. There is an atmosphere of trust and both teachers and students believe that they have a firm commitment to collaboration and learning.

1. evidence of high energy and enthusiasm across the school
2. a reputation for high quality in teaching and learning
3. a collaborative culture among staff
4. innovation, experimentation and risk taking in pedagogy and curriculum
5. reflective practices among the professional staff
6. authentic community involvement
7. a record of improved student learning outcomes (Mitchell and Sackney, p. 32).

Figure 3. Characteristics of high-capacity schools, from Mitchell and Sackney (2009, p. 32).

Mitchell and Sackney (2009) realized that in schools that operate as high-capacity learning communities, teachers are driven to improve their teaching because they have "vision," they collaborate and discuss learning and teaching through professional "discourse," and they are able to "sustain" their efforts to improve (p. 33). There are "deep connections among people, structures, functions, and outcomes" (p. 34).

Mitchell and Sackney (2009) also identified what they referred to as "principles of engagement" (p. 34). The principles of engagement include "deep respect" for all, "collective responsibility" for improvement, an "experimental orientation" to discover ways to improve and try new things, an "appreciation of diversity" and "positive role modeling" by everyone in the learning community (pp. 34-36). This is an interesting model as it places learning at the center with a deep respect for the unique needs and abilities of learners and teachers. I also appreciate the fact that Mitchell and Sackney see the importance of risk taking, or what might be referred to as an inquiry approach to improving teaching and learning. Often the best way to discover what works and what

does not is to implement change, assess the results, and make decisions based on the results; high-capacity schools encourage this sort of experimentation.

Reculturing Schools Through Collaborative Inquiry and Distributed Leadership

Copeland (2003) argued that the traditional role of the school principal as the person charged with the sole responsibility and power to make school improvement decisions rarely exists in high capacity schools. Instead, the most effective schools are embracing the concept of learning communities where the vision and work of improving the school is shared by all its stakeholders. In outlining the reform effort of the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC), Copeland suggested that sustainable improvement is most effective in schools in which leadership is distributed and improvements to teaching and learning are made through continual inquiry and shared decision making.

Copeland (2003) maintained that distributed leadership is "collective activity, focused on collective goals" (p. 377). He also pointed out that there are networks of "interacting individuals" guiding school improvement, rather than "singular individuals" (p. 378). Teachers and principals redefine their roles and responsibilities according to the task and leadership boundaries are open. Leadership is "situational"; teachers take on leadership roles because they have the necessary knowledge and expertise to tackle a problem or move an initiative forward (p. 378). Among other roles, the principal recognizes expertise and builds leadership capacity to tap into the "numerous, distinct, germane perspectives and capabilities...found in individuals [and] spread throughout the organization" (p. 378).

Copeland (2003) stated that in order for distributed leadership to "take root and succeed" it is necessary to build a culture of trust and collaboration, a "strong consensus" among staff regarding a focus for improvement, and "rich expertise with approaches to improving teaching and learning" (pp. 379, 380). The BASRC's Cycle of Inquiry is a collaborative approach that assists teachers with identifying areas for improvement and implementing and evaluating reform initiatives. The cycle guides teachers through the process of selecting specific questions for investigation, identifying targets and goals, taking action, and collecting data and analyzing results. The final step of the cycle asks participants to reevaluate their initial research problem, and if necessary, to refine their approach.

Longitudinal studies of schools that were working with the BASRC's Cycle of Inquiry revealed plenty of variation in the development of inquiry practices. Several *novice* schools (schools that were new to the idea of teacher inquiry), struggled with establishing questions for inquiry and gathering and analyzing data. Copeland (2003) suggested that these schools were often "paralyzed" with worry about what the data might show (p. 385). Other schools were considered to be at an *intermediate* stage of confidence with the inquiry approach. Teachers reported feeling energized and "buoyed" by their progress (p. 385). Most of these schools could see the value of collecting data to inform their inquiry, although some schools tended to look for solutions without first clearly defining the problem. The inquiry focus was often victim to high staff turnover in intermediate schools. Schools that were identified as *advanced* in their use of inquiry had moved beyond the initial awkwardness of learning the inquiry cycle and were now focused on improvement. In these schools teachers had made a meaningful connection

between school-level inquiry and classroom-based inquiry. Furthermore, advanced schools were able to strengthen their reform efforts by relying on support from the many experts in their school learning community.

Copeland (2003) suggested that distributed leadership and collaborative research can help schools make meaningful and sustainable improvements. Copeland maintained that the school principal "provides a catalyst" to get this important reform work underway by "serving notice" that change is needed and helping to create and support new leadership structures throughout the school (p. 388). The principal supports teacher inquiry and encourages others to assume leadership roles and he or she stands ready to "protect the vision for the school's reform work" (p. 391). Distributed leadership builds as schools become more confident with using an inquiry-based approach.

Munro (2004) described a project to improve literacy in several Melbourne schools. In an effort to help students in all subject areas to "use their literacy skills in a knowledge enhancing way" and "to engage in focused research and to read spontaneously in a self-initiated task oriented way," members of the school community worked together to implement a strategic approach to improve literacy (p. 2). The objective was to improve the comprehension of text by teaching students reading comprehension strategies and to make this an integral part of teaching for all teachers. Furthermore, the new literacy focus was not to be an add-on, but rather to "teach the content targeted in each lesson" (p.1). These researchers anticipated that with practice students could eventually use the strategies "spontaneously" with less direction from teachers (p. 1).

Distributed leadership and collaborative research were key to the success of the project. Munro (2004) identified three levels of learning that were needed. First, teachers

needed to perceive that it was necessary to make literacy improvements in their subject areas. This was a challenge as teachers in many subject areas needed to be "encouraged to see that teaching literacy was their responsibility" (p. 3). Second, in order to assist teachers, professional learning teams, led by teachers "trained specifically to lead improved literacy teaching, were created for each subject area (p. 4). With the expertise of the leaders, teams were able develop a "vision and action plan for literacy enhancement" (p. 4). Finally, the leaders from each learning team formed a school leadership team and worked together to share the vision of each department and "co-ordinate the school-wide literacy improvement activities" (p. 4).

Professional development for literacy leaders was on-going. Munro (2004) listed the *Key Components to Secondary School Literacy Leadership Preparation*, which I have included in Figure 4.

1. An in-depth study of literacy learning at the secondary level, individual differences in literacy performance and innovative literacy teaching procedures. They [need] sufficient knowledge to make relevant decisions, guide and scaffold the literacy knowledge of the team, map it into teaching practice and to suggest possible problem solving teaching activities.

2. An understanding of the instructional leadership procedures necessary to foster constructive dialogue about improved literacy teaching.

3. Skills to foster specific teaching or procedural improvement...modeling and coaching techniques for use in classrooms.

4. Skills to guide professional action learning; understanding how teams learn, the conditions for group learning, guiding relevant action research.

5. Skills to lead a professional learning team; leading the team to frame literacy learning goals, develop and enhanced action plan, monitor student and staff progress and implement data collection.

Figure 4. Key components to secondary school literacy leadership preparation, from Munro (2004, p. 6).

My final research question was about leadership: I wanted to know what is required of a teacher leader in guiding a process of teacher inquiry to improve literacy instruction. I believe that Munro has provided a useful framework for this discussion, so I will return to the key components outlined in Figure 4 when I reflect on my own skills in leading the Literacy Inquiry Team.

Educational Change in Practice

In this section I will briefly introduce two of Fullan's (2007) ideas that have had a deep influence on my study. Each of these ideas have helped to shape the direction of the study and helped me to assess success of our literacy initiative and to consider its usefulness in furthering literacy improvement at Meadowview Secondary School.

Fullan (2007) argued that educational "change is multidimensional" because there are at least three components or dimensions that must be considered when introducing any new initiative (p. 30). These dimensions include the use of "new or revised materials," the use of new teaching methods such as "new teaching strategies or activities," and "the possible alteration of beliefs" which includes "pedagogical assumptions and theories" about teaching and programs (p. 30). Fullan pointed out that, although a teacher could implement only one or two of these components, without making changes along all three dimensions, an initiative will not be successful:

> It is perhaps worth repeating that changes in actual practice along the three dimensions – in materials, teaching approaches, and beliefs, in what people do and think – are essential if the intended outcome is to be achieved (p. 37).

In my study I have been careful to consider how each member of the Literacy Inquiry Team might investigate making improvements along all three of these dimensions. I will return to these three dimensions when I discuss my first research question, which asks

what specific changes teachers will make to improve reading and comprehension in their classes, and again in my second question, which asks about each teacher's views on the success of these changes.

Fullan (2007) discussed the importance of opportunities "for teachers to engage in deeper questioning and sustained learning" (p. 28). He also stressed that collaboration should be "focused and sustained" (p. 26). Meaningful change is only possible if schools can find ways to support opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively to develop skills to improve teaching and learning:

> First, change will always fail until we find some way of developing infrastructures and processes that engage teachers in developing new knowledge, skills, and understandings. Second, it turns out that we are taking not about the surface meaning, but rather deep meaning about new approaches to teaching and learning (p. 29).

I see a strong connection here to what others have discovered about the power of collaborative inquiry groups and learning communities. I also see an opportunity to reflect on this idea of deep and shared meaning with the Literacy Inquiry Team.

Mental Mindsets

Our past experiences and deeply held beliefs can have a significant effect on how we perceive change. Dweck (2006) identified two ways in which people perceive intelligence and learning. Those with a fixed mindset regard intelligence as innate and unchangeable. These people are uncomfortable with change and worry about failure. On the other hand, people with a growth mindset believe that intelligence is cultivated through challenge and effort. These people actively seek challenges and opportunities to develop.

Senge (2006) used the term "mental models" to describe our deeply held beliefs or our "internal images of how the world works" (p. 8). He added that mental models can "limit us" when we rely on "familiar ways of thinking and acting" (p. 8). Senge suggested that these mental models can only be changed after we first acknowledge them and admit that they are limiting our actions. After "turning the mirror inward" to expose our ways of thinking, he suggested that we "hold them rigorously to scrutiny" (p. 8). Senge recognized that members of an organization have a commitment to each other and that our mental models can put limits on the effectiveness of the organization. He used the term "learningful conversations" in describing a way that people can work together to "expose their thinking effectively and make that thinking open to the influence of others" (p. 9).

Kaser and Halbert (2009) stated that it is important for educators to understand how our mental mindsets can put limits on our ability to make instructional improvements. The authors suggested that understanding our mindsets might help teachers "develop the kind of expertise they need to address new and develop transformational solutions" (p. 17). They added that change is often uncomfortable, but changing our mindsets might be necessary "as we shift from an emphasis on teaching to a focus on deep learning" (p. 17).

Fullan (2007) wrote about how our beliefs are connected to our experiences. He suggested that teachers can change their beliefs about instructional improvement, but only after seeing the effectiveness of these changes firsthand. Fullan stated that "new beliefs and higher expectations" come from "new experiences" (p. 59). Before a person can change his or her beliefs, he or she must first "aquire meaning" (p. 37). Hume (2008)

agreed. She stated that "change is rooted in your own actions" (p. 30). She added that once you commit to an innovation, "you can act your way into a new way of thinking" once you see the results (p. 27).

The Concerns Based Adoption Model

As a result of our mental models, teachers will express different levels of concern as they try a new innovation. Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, and Hall (1987) developed the *Concerns Based Adoption Model* as a means of identifying the developmental stages of concern. (*The Concerns Based Adoption Model* is reprinted in Appendix C). The authors point out that while a teacher's concerns will typically develop as a result of his or her experience with an innovation, "the progression is not absolute and certainly does not happen to each person in a like manner" (p. 38).

There are seven stages of concern. In stage zero, called "awareness," teachers are not aware of the innovation and show no self-concern (p. 37). In stage one, called "informational," teachers have heard about the innovation and would like more information about it (p. 37). Stage two is called "personal" (p. 37). Teachers at this stage show self-concern about how this innovation will affect them personally. "Management" is the third stage of concern (p. 37). Teachers at this stage show more task-concern and might worry about the time it takes to implement the new innovation. In stage four, called "consequence," teachers are now concerned about how the innovation might be affecting the students (p. 37). The concern is now about impact. Stage five, or "collaboration," is when teachers are concerned about how what they are doing in the classrooms relates "with what other instructors are doing" (p. 37). The final stage of concern is stage six or "refocusing" (p. 37). In this last stage, teachers are still concerned about the impact of the

innovation; however, they have begun to think about how an innovation might be modified and improved to better fit the needs of students and teachers.

Conclusion

Exploring the literature has helped me to develop an informed course of action for improving literacy instruction at Meadowview Secondary School. There are a wide range of instructional practices, as well as initiatives that take place outside of the classroom that can help promote literacy and develop and nurture a culture of student readers. The literature supports the idea that comprehensive plans to improve literacy include an increase in silent reading, an evaluation of reading materials, and the teaching of strategies that will help students to monitor their thinking and to better navigate what they are reading.

The literature also maintains that collaboration and leadership are essential to school wide improvement. This body of literacy and leadership literature helped me define my role as a teacher leader: to work with other teachers to help them realize why teaching reading is important and to help them to develop ideas to try in their classrooms. Each class is unique and I knew that it would be a challenge to adapt the ideas to fit each specific curriculum.

As I developed this study, it was clear that I could not hope to change the culture of the school in one semester or even one year. Building capacity for change takes time and ensuring the sustainability of a program takes much longer. Fullan (2007) argued that school reform requires a change in culture, and this can only happen if there is "intensive action sustained over several years" (p. 7). He explained that sustainable change in schools is not possible without first building shared or "collective meaning" about school

improvement (p. 9). Fullan argued that the kind of action that leads to the cultural change of classrooms and schools is both physical and attitudinal. For teachers, this means working "naturally together in joint planning; observation of one another's practice; and seeking, testing, and revising teaching strategies on a continuous basis" (p.7). Given that understanding, this study documents a change process that can be expected to build in momentum through teacher leadership and the developing collaborative spirit of our learning community at MSS.

III. METHODOLOGY

For this study I have chosen to use a collaborative professional inquiry method, informed by the planning, acting, and reflecting cycles of action research. Creswell (2008) described a design "that encourages collaboration among school and community participants to help transform schools and educational practices" (p. 599). He also stated that "action researchers collaborate with others, often involving co-participants in the research" (p. 608). However, Greenwood and Levin (2007) asserted that action research must have two essential characteristics: an effort to solve a practical problem, and a social justice component. In this tradition, teacher researchers would empower students, who would share in problem-framing and research design. Because this study focused on teacher learning and did not include students as research participants, I describe my method as professional inquiry, informed by action research, specifically its cycles of action and reflection as applied by teachers to practical problems.

In this study, I invited other teachers to try to infuse literacy across the curriculum, and as a result, to help improve teaching and learning. Collaborative inquiry and teacher leadership were fundamental to this literacy initiative and to this study. Ultimately, in guiding teachers through the inquiry process, my goal was to implement a plan of action to improve literacy instruction and learning in a variety of classrooms, including my own. As collaborating members of the Literacy Inquiry Team, we also wanted to explore how literacy could become a school-wide focus for improvement. Finally, it was my objective to develop and assess my own leadership skills through this school improvement initiative.

Theoretical Perspectives

In this section I will explain collaborative action research, also known as collaborative inquiry. This is the theoretical perspective that guided my study.

Collaborative Inquiry

Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) defined their version of inquiry, participatory action research, as "an alternative philosophy of social research...often associated with social transformation" (p. 568). Participatory research necessitates a community focus on change: there is "shared ownership" of the research with all participants in the community group, the group is working together to analyze the problem and interpret the results, and there is "an orientation toward community action" (p. 268). Simply put, participants are working as a community to invoke change.

Classroom action research is also about improvement and change, specifically improving teaching practices. It involves the collection of data "by teachers...with a view to teachers making judgments about how to improve their own practices" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p. 569). Kemmis and McTaggart emphasized the word "practical" as it is teachers themselves who are interpreting the data and taking action and implementing changes as a result (p. 569).

Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) suggested that participatory action research is often conducted after people critically reflect upon their current reality:

> It emerges when people want to think "realistically" about where they are now, how things came to be that way, and, from these starting points, how, in practice, things might be changed (p. 573)

In the case of teachers, this means critically understanding the current reality and effectiveness of teaching practices before examining ways to improve and developing an

action plan. Although teachers are not usually scientific researchers, participatory action research is a "common sense" approach that is made more "authentic" if teachers can see things "intersubjectively, from one's point of view and from the point of view of others" (p. 574).

Professional inquiry, like participatory action research, is not about finding unconditional "truths," but rather understanding that the best course of action depends on the circumstances and situation. It would be unwise to suggest that discoveries made and changes implemented by a team of inquirers at one school should be the correct course of action in other classrooms elsewhere. Nevertheless, the findings generated through professional inquiry may be informative to others. As Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) suggested, in action research, the "truth…is always fallible":

> It is always shaped by particular views and material-social-historical circumstances, and that can be approached only intersubjectively – through exploration of the extent to which it seems accurate, morally right and appropriate, and authentic in the light of our lived experience (p. 580).

In making change and learning from it "as they go," teachers discover their own truths as they fit their particular situation (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p. 181). This is not to say that teachers as researchers are not critical or objective about studying their teaching practices. Although some scholars might object to a lack of rigor, the practicality of action research cannot be ignored. Participatory action research is about transforming practice through critical reasoning and implementing an action plan. It is the participants themselves, and not academics, who must decide what requires improving, and likewise, it is the participants themselves who "live with the consequences" of change (p. 592).

Cooper and White (2008) also argued that the most successful efforts to improve schools are initiated by teachers. Their three-year action research project to improve literacy at an Ontario elementary school was "teacher-driven," with teacher researchers leading the way and with support coming from the principal and other "stakeholders" in the school (p. 103). Together, the staff was able to improve learning for the students through a process of collaborative inquiry as well as "a process of continuously challenging their practices" (p. 103). The authors felt that change was sustainable because the teachers who conducted the research felt "a strong feeling of ownership of not only the process and product, but [also the] sustained change" (p. 103).

Collaborative action research can lead to sustainable school improvement by transforming the culture of a school from one in which teachers work in isolation with a focus on teaching to one that encourages "shared responsibility, commitment, and communication" and a focus on learning (Donohoo & Hannay, 2008, p. 10). The action research or inquiry process and the improvements that stem from it can be meaningful to teachers when they are driven by a "common focus" and deeply explored through collaborative work and problem solving (p. 10).

Donohoo and Hannay (2008) suggested that collaborative action research is also powerful for teachers because it promotes deep personal reflection and challenges beliefs and mental models. Collecting and analyzing data provides teachers with a "mirror through which [they] see their practice" (p. 5). Furthermore, in sharing their reflections with others on the action research team, teachers clarify and deepen their understandings about teaching and learning and "expand...their instructional repertoire" (p. 5). Personal reflection helps teachers to plan personal actions, such as engaging in more inquiry,

reading books to enhance teaching skills or taking part in professional development. The reflective process also helps teachers to identify changes they will make "to improve the opportunities for students" (p. 8).

Action research provides an opportunity for teachers to lead the way in making deep and lasting school improvements. Donohoo and Hannay (2008) discussed the possibility of introducing action research to others in the school as a means to "help to ingrain a culture of inquiry and reflection" (p. 9). Creating this culture helps to build capacity for professional learning communities and makes changes sustainable, even when staff members move from the school (p. 9). Lastly, action research provides a vehicle for staff members to work together to achieve the goals set out in their school achievement plans.

Although there are many different action research methods, I am most interested in a collaborative, action research-informed version of professional inquiry. The literature suggests that collaborative action research, which is also referred to as collaborative inquiry, is an effective method for guiding teachers in making improvements to teaching and learning. I believe this method is an ideal approach for this study.

Process of Inquiry

In this section I have outlined the steps of the inquiry process. I begin by describing the research site as well as introducing the reader to the teachers who were part of the Literacy Inquiry Team. Finally, I describe Sagor's (2000) seven step research process, which is the professional inquiry model that I chose to follow in this study.

Research Site

Meadowview Secondary School (a pseudonym) is an inner city grade eight to twelve school in northern British Columbia. At the time of this study, the population was approximately 1350 students, with more than half of the school's students enrolled in grades eleven and twelve. Most of the students at Meadowview Secondary School enroll here in grade eleven, after attending one of the school district's junior secondary schools, and a smaller number of students enroll in the school in grade eight after attending one of the elementary feeder schools. The student population of Meadowview Secondary School is diverse in terms of culture and socioeconomic status. As each participant on the Literacy Inquiry Team was responsible for conducting his or her part of the study, the study took place in five classrooms at MSS. Six collaborative meetings with the members of the Literacy Inquiry Team took place in a quiet classroom during lunchtime or after school. The seventh collaborative meeting included members of both the Literacy Inquiry Team and the MSS Literacy Team.

Participants

Five teachers were part of the collaborative inquiry: Shane, Terry, Sharon, Natalie and myself (Steve). The names of these teachers have been changed to protect their privacy. Shane taught French and Spanish. Terry taught Combined Studies (English 10 and Social Studies 10) and she was also a librarian and literacy coach. Sharon taught Planning and Family Studies. Natalie taught Art and Social Studies. I taught English Language Arts, and during this study I worked with a small number of grade eight students in a Reading Support Program. I was seeking participants from a diverse range

of teaching areas and after I explained the objectives of the study, four teachers volunteered to be part of the Literacy Inquiry Team.

Negotiating Entry to the Field Site

Prior to beginning with the study, I completed an ethics application and permissions were granted from both the University of Northern British Columbia research ethics board (see Appendix D) and School District 57 (see Appendix E). Permission was also granted by the principal of Meadowview Secondary School. Participants in the study were given a detailed letter explaining the procedures of the study and each participant signed a consent form prior to the study. Fieldwork for the study began in September, 2009, and was completed in January, 2010.

Procedures: Sagor's (2000) Seven-Step Action Research Process

In working with the Literacy Inquiry Team, I led the group through the seven-step action research process that was suggested by Sagor (2000) (See Figure 1). I was optimistic that this framework for conducting professional inquiry would help us to pinpoint areas where students were struggling with literacy and help each Literacy Inquiry Team member to develop an action plan for improving literacy instruction. After working together as a team to explore professional readings and to develop a clear research focus, we would investigate tools to gather data. After each teacher had completed each stage of data collection, I anticipated that he or she would have a clearer picture of how improved literacy instruction might impact student learning. I was also optimistic that in coming together to analyze and discuss the results we would be able to continue to refine and improve literacy instruction and perhaps look for opportunities to

build capacity for literacy improvement outside of our Literacy Inquiry Team by sharing our results with other teachers.

Our first meeting was on September 11. During this meeting we discussed how we would gather some preliminary anecdotal data about our students as well as form conclusions about the accessibility of the reading materials we were using this semester. In the first stage of the study, teachers clarified their focus (Sagor 2000). Data was collected by each of the action researchers as he or she worked to establish a clear picture of the unique literacy needs, skills, and interests of the students in his her classroom. Teachers had conversations with their students at the start of semester and made observations about the types of books students liked to read during silent reading time and documented student comments about pleasure reading as well as reading in a particular subject area, such as Social Studies. I also worked with members of the Literacy Inquiry Team to try to gauge the accessibility of the reading materials we used in teaching our courses. A journal helped teachers to gather some of this anecdotal data as well as to record other thoughts and suggestions about the possible focus of the inquiry.

The Literacy Inquiry Team met together on September 28 for a reflective group interview with the team to share the data from the first step of our study. Once we had discussed our students' unique literacy needs, we worked to clarify our theories about literacy improvement. This was the second step of the Sagor's (2000) action research process. Together we tried to identify the variables that were most crucial to improving literacy instruction by brainstorming the factors that needed to be addressed in order to assist our students. Next, we created a graphic reconstruction called a "priority pie,"

which is essentially a pie chart that assigns a percent value, based on the team's judgment, of the perceived influence that each variable has on student literacy (p. 15).

Sagor (2000) suggested that action researchers take this prioritized list and do a comprehensive literature review to see what other investigators have discovered about the topic. I decided to assist with the literature review by providing members of the team with chapters from Tovani (2004), Allington (2006), and Harvey and Goudvis' (2007) books. I also made these books available to the team in case members chose to read them in their entirety. I anticipated that professional reading might help members of the Literacy Inquiry Team to explore a range of possibilities for improving literacy instruction.

Before we took steps to implement a plan to improve literacy instruction, we asked ourselves to identify three classroom inquiry questions that we hoped to answer while doing research in our unique classrooms. We returned to the graphic reconstruction we made earlier to help us in identifying these questions. Sagor (2000) suggested that having good inquiry questions will help action researchers know where to focus their inquiry efforts.

At our third meeting, on October 15, we began by sharing what had been learned from the literature and discussed how this information might relate to the specific needs of our students. Next, we shared our classroom inquiry questions. Sharing our questions with the entire Literacy Inquiry Team helped to initiate a fruitful discussion about how we might try to arrive at some answers. We looked to the literature to see what instructional strategies others had suggested and how they could be applied to address the classroom inquiry questions created by our team members. At the end of this meeting I

suggested that we use our questions to help each of us select one or two instructional strategies to try over the next four weeks and to identify several ways to collect data in order to gauge the effectiveness of these instructional strategies. The instructional strategies were drawn from the literature review that teachers were invited to explore.

Data collection was the fourth step of Sagor's (2000) action research process. I initiated a conversation about how data might be collected and provided a *data triangulation matrix* sample to assist each member in selecting enough data sources to ensure triangulation. I also completed a similar matrix and collected my own data. An example of this matrix is presented in Figure 5.

Classroom Inquiry Question	Data Source #1	Data Source #2	Data Source #3	Data Source #4
What evidence is there that attitudes towards reading improve when silent reading becomes part of the daily routine?	Survey (pre and post)	Student interviews and observations	Student personal reading logs	Student journals
What do students do when they no longer comprehend what they are reading?	Survey	Student interviews	Student Journal	
What evidence is there that comprehension strategies help students to produce more thoughtful writing?	Grade book data (paragraph writing)	Student journals	Student interviews	

Figure 5. Sample triangulation matrix for an inquiry on student reading.

As suggested by Sagor (2000), in addition to creating the triangulated data collection matrix, we worked together to brainstorm a list of things that needed to be

accomplished in order to implement each instructional strategy. We also identified any supports that might be necessary, such as additional resources, or assistance from the literacy coach or other members of the Literacy Inquiry Team. Finally, each Literacy Inquiry Team member established a realistic timeline for completing each data collection task that was outlined in his or her triangulated data collection matrix. We recorded this information on chart paper.

Members of the Literacy Inquiry Team continued to collect data for the month of October and were invited to bring their data to our meeting on October 29. In the meantime I visited classrooms to support team members with their efforts to implement literacy instruction and collect data. The Literacy Inquiry Team members were also encouraged to keep a personal journal to record their thoughts and observations.

Data analysis was the fifth stage of the action research process (Sagor, 2000). During our fourth meeting, on October 29, we shared our data with the team and worked to analyze and interpret our findings based on the classroom inquiry questions each of us created earlier in the study. I asked each team member to examine the data and to prepare a list of trends and other tentative findings from his or her classroom.

On December 9 we had our fifth meeting. I shared Sagor's (2000) strategy for creating a data analysis matrix so that team members could support and document the list of findings with evidence from the data. We compiled a list of our findings and recorded them on chart paper as "narrative statements" (p. 133). Next, we summarized our understandings of what we had learned. For each of our specific research questions we made a "summary assertion" based on our findings (p. 135). We then took our findings back to the classroom to check that they were valid. Sagor suggested that sharing findings

with the students is a "fast and efficient" method of member checking (p. 136). Based on the feedback of the students, members of the Literacy Inquiry Team remained confident in their assertions. Participants documented student comments about the findings in their journals and brought the results back to the next meeting.

We met for the sixth time on January 11, 2010. At this meeting we revisited the work we did in mid September when we clarified our theories in a graphic reconstruction called a "priority pie" (Sagor, 2000, p. 17). After a brief discussion of the progress we had made this semester, we spent the majority of this meeting considering two umbrella questions:

1. What evidence is there that improved literacy instruction is having a positive impact on student achievement?
2. What are some opportunities to share our inquiry with other teachers at Meadowview Secondary School and build further capacity for improved literacy instruction?

These questions helped to draw the members of the team together to discuss how the results of each classroom inquiry might contribute to answers that would benefit more students and teachers at MSS. These umbrella questions also connected to my literacy leadership questions, specifically those related to teacher leadership, and to the classroom inquiry proposed by each member of the Literacy Inquiry Team earlier in the study.

Our seventh and final meeting was on January 13, 2010, when our Literacy Inquiry Team met together with the MSS Literacy Team. During this meeting, each member of the team had the opportunity to discuss his or her classroom inquiry questions, findings, and assertions, and share what had been gained by working through

the collaborative inquiry process. The MSS Literacy Team offered some valuable feedback to the Literacy Inquiry Team and made suggestions about how we could build further capacity for improving literacy instruction. After we discussed our research with the MSS Literacy Team, we had a discussion about what we would do next. In this final step of the inquiry process each team member shared his or her action plan. Each person decided if he or she would continue with the instructional changes made as a result of the inquiry and whether he or she would expand and go deeper with literacy instruction in the future. Each member of the Literacy Inquiry Team was asked to comment on what went well and what did not go well and to speak about specific changes that could address the challenges.

Data Collection

Each member of the Literacy Inquiry Team collected data from several different sources. Student interviews, surveys, rubrics, grade book data, writing portfolios, silent reading logs, and anecdotal observations provided evidence of student needs as well as student learning. Classroom teachers were invited to keep a journal throughout the study. Here they could keep a record of thoughts about the activities and readings, student progress, concerns and frustrations, and anything else they felt the need to document. The journal was a private record for the participant and was not to be shared with me as the principal researcher. It was simply a tool to help teachers to monitor their own thinking and bring specific observations or issues to the Literacy Inquiry Team. Throughout the study, I documented the progress of the Literacy Inquiry Team as I met with the group during scheduled meetings and informally as I visited classrooms and had casual conversations with each of the members in the hallway and staffroom. I kept a field

journal to help record the anecdotal data I collected from daily observations, questions, and comments made by members of the inquiry team as well as my own thoughts about our progress as we moved through the seven steps of the action research process. The notes I made were shared with the members of the team to ensure their accuracy.

Using my three leadership inquiry questions (my overall questions for the study, as noted in Chapter 1, page 2 and 3), I prepared the triangulated data collection matrix presented in Figure 6 to ensure that I collected reliable and valid data.

Literacy Leadership Question	Data Source #1	Data Source #2	Data Source #3	Data Source #4
What specific changes will teachers make to their teaching (instruction, reading materials, and comprehension strategies) to improve reading and comprehension in their classes?	Anecdotal data collected early in the study	Brainstormed list of variables made in meeting #2, as well as the graphic reconstruction	literature review as well as strategies shared by team members	Analysis of the data collected by team members to reveal the usefulness of instructional changes
What are teacher's views on the success of these changes?	Anecdotal data collected early in the study	Reflective interviews in session two	Evidence of instructional changes tried by teachers	Compiled list of findings and summary assertions and action plans
What is required of a teacher leader in guiding a process of teacher inquiry to improve literacy instruction?	Interview data	Anecdotal data collected as I led the team. The story of my support, changes of direction, challenges	Team member literacy action plans	Transcribed and coded data as members made presentations to the literacy team in session seven.

Figure 6. Data triangulation matrix for the literacy leadership inquiry.

Each of the Literacy Inquiry Team meetings were tape recorded and later transcribed in their entirety. After transcribing each meeting, it was sometimes necessary to contact members of the Literacy Inquiry Team to provide further clarification. I then made notes in my field journal. Once transcripts were completed, they were shared with each member of the team to ensure their accuracy. I then made descriptive notes and began to analyze the transcripts. As the Literacy Inquiry Team moved through each of the seven steps of the research process, new data emerged to help me to answer my three literacy leadership inquiry questions.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore connections between teacher leadership and school improvement, specifically by attempting to improve literacy instruction through collaborative, teacher-led initiatives. The study also introduced teachers at Meadowview Secondary School to collaborative inquiry and Sagor's (2000) seven-step action research process. In establishing opportunities for collaboration, identifying needs for literacy improvement, implementing programs in a few classrooms, and sharing the results with others in the learning community, I anticipated that the work done by the Literacy Inquiry Team would provide the groundwork for a more comprehensive plan for school-wide literacy improvement.

This study has provided me with an opportunity to reflect on and clarify my beliefs about literacy instruction and leadership. The inquiry process described here helped me to empower teachers, including myself, to make instructional changes, not because were directed to do so, but because we were genuinely interested in making meaningful changes to how we teach literacy for the benefit of our students. As a team

we coordinated the change effort and created our own action plans based on our perceptions of the needs of our students. As a leader, I encouraged teachers to join the Literacy Inquiry Team, guided us through the inquiry process, and perhaps most importantly, worked with a few teachers to develop a shared vision for school improvement and stronger beliefs in the effectiveness of our instructional improvements.

IV. EXPERIENCES OF THE LITERACY INQUIRY TEAM

This chapter documents the journey of five teachers who were searching for ways to better meet the learning needs of their students. All of the teachers that were part of the team, including myself, agreed that improving literacy was, and continues to be, an important goal for our students. Furthermore, we all believed that regardless of the subject area in which we teach, we have a role to play in improving literacy by making literacy instruction a key focus of our teaching. As a teacher leader, I had investigated literacy and teacher collaboration in the literature and I had identified promising strategies. I had also laid out a sequence of inquiry steps and a timeline but we were not sure where these steps might lead.

This chapter is a collection of our shared experiences and our perceptions as we made a concerted effort, guided by Sagor's (2000) action research model, to make literacy instruction improvements in each of our classrooms. It is also a collection of our thoughts and beliefs about literacy instruction in general as well as our thoughts about the literacy needs of our students. This chapter also documents a conversation we had about how we might begin to build further capacity with teachers beyond the Literacy Inquiry Team to make school-wide improvements to literacy instruction. Throughout this process I have documented my own perceptions regarding my growth as a leader.

Establishing a Supportive Environment and a Shared Vision for Improvement

My third literacy leadership question for this study was about leadership. I asked myself, *What is required of a teacher leader in guiding a process of teacher inquiry to improve literacy instruction?* Establishing the team was relatively easy; however, once the work was about to get underway, my anxiety became very real. I was asking team

members to make a large commitment of energy and time to learn new instructional techniques and to gather and interpret data and attend meetings. In addition to the workload, I was also asking members to take some large risks and step outside of their comfort zones. They would be trying new instructional methods, perhaps using reading materials that they were not familiar with, and then sharing their experiences with a team of teachers that they did not collaborate with regularly. Despite what I had read in the literature, I was also a bit nervous that our inquiry might leave teachers struggling for instructional time near the end of semester. My greatest fear was that teachers might commit halfheartedly to the inquiry and not make significant improvements to their instruction.

As a leader, my first objective was to create a safe and supportive environment where members of the team could share their work and offer insights without fear of ridicule. Secondly, I wanted the work to be meaningful for each member of the team and I made a commitment to remain flexible and attentive to the varied needs of our team and to support each member with advice and resources. Finally, I wanted to begin the tasks of building a shared vision for literacy and establishing a shared vision of improvement. In describing and analyzing the earliest phases of the inquiry, I aim to highlight the importance of these leadership skills.

Our First Steps into Inquiry

The Literacy Inquiry Team met for the first time on September 11. The purpose of this brief meeting was to provide a broad overview of the inquiry method and to have a discussion about a wide range of possibilities for integrating improved literacy instruction into our classes. This time was also used, as planned, to explain in detail the first step,

which was to gather anecdotal data about the literacy needs of our students and to evaluate the reading materials we would be using this semester.

We began by sharing some literacy improvements each of us were considering. The environment was friendly and relaxed and team members were respectful and attentive to each other's ideas. I noted that each of the members of the team demonstrated excellent listening skills, both in terms of their posture and the positive responses they gave to one another. As team leader, I invited a volunteer to begin, and encouraged others to respond. I thanked each member of the team after ideas were shared.

Natalie began. She decided that improvements to literacy instruction could be made in her Social Studies 10 and Art 11 and Art 12 classes. Sharon shared her thoughts about incorporating silent reading time and teaching some of the content of her Family Studies 11 class through short stories and novels. Terry decided that she would focus her efforts on her Combined Studies 10 class (this is an alternate program for grade 10 students who struggle in both Social Studies 10 and English Language Arts 10 courses), and make student choice an integral part of a sustained silent reading program. She also expressed an interest in enhancing her nonfiction reading program with comprehension improvement strategies this semester. Terry is also a literacy coach and teacher librarian as well as a member of the School District Literacy Team; she has many years of experience in improving literacy instruction. Shane was not quite certain where he would begin to make instructional improvements but he decided that he would focus most of his literacy efforts on his French 11 classes. I shared that I was considering a sustained silent reading program in my English Language Arts 11 and 12 classes as well as in my grade eight Reading Support Program (an intervention program for struggling readers). I would

invite my students to choose their own books; I would begin by inviting students to select fictional texts and later in the semester students would read nonfiction books. Finally, because my grade eights struggled with reading comprehension, I would focus my efforts on teaching them to use comprehension strategies.

We concluded the meeting with a discussion of the first phase of the inquiry. This was my first real leadership challenge as I was now asking my team members to collect data and then to consider carefully and perhaps modify their initial instructional plans. The team had many ideas about possible literacy improvements; however, the literature had suggested that any initial planning for instructional changes should begin with some probing into the reality of our classrooms. I shared with the others my conviction that we must begin our inquiry by first gaining a better understanding of our students' needs. I asked each of the members of the team if they would keep a personal journal over the next two weeks in which they could document some of their observations about the literacy needs of their students. I left this up to teachers to decide how best to do, although I suggested that we might begin by having our students comment on some questions about their reading interests. I provided members of the Literacy Inquiry Team with the example shown in Figure 7.

At the end of the meeting Shane had some questions regarding integrating silent reading time and teaching comprehension strategies to students in his French 11 classes. Shane pointed out that teaching languages is a "two step process" in which students must translate individual words from another language and then comprehend the text in its entirety. Shane was concerned that comprehension strategies might be difficult to adapt for his French 11 classes. Shane also stated that "even kids books [written in French] are

written at too challenging of a level" for his students. I could see that he was worried that it might be difficult to find accessible materials for silent reading. I was concerned that Shane would not find the inquiry very meaningful if he could not access materials and instructional strategies that meet the learning needs of his French 11 students. As team leader, I knew that I could support Shane and ease his anxiety if I could help him find resources.

1. Do you enjoy reading
    a. For pleasure?
    b. In content courses, such as Science, Social Studies, and English?
2. Do you sometimes struggle with reading? Explain.
3. What do you do when you no longer understand what you are reading?
4. What genres of fiction are you interested in? (fantasy, romance, horror, crime, science fiction, etcetera).
5. What nonfiction topics interest you?
6. Do you think it would be helpful and enjoyable to have more time in class to simply read? Explain.

Figure 7. Steve's questions about student reading interests and attitudes.

Assisting Others With Resources

As I am not a languages teacher, I had not thought about how I might integrate literacy instruction with French 11. As a leader, it was important to support each of the members of the team with resources. I offered to contact Cheryl, our District Curriculum Administrator, to see what she could suggest. As Cheryl is the coordinator of our District Literacy Team as well as a former French teacher, I was optimistic that she could give Shane some direction with regards to resources and instructional strategies. On

September 14, I contacted Cheryl and she agreed to come to our school to meet with Shane. I asked Terry if she could attend the meeting as well. As Terry is a literacy coach, I anticipated that she might be able to use some of Cheryl's suggestions to assist other teachers in our school, and thereby build further capacity. I attended the meeting to document the conversation.

After Shane expressed his concerns, Cheryl explained that the goal of a literacy program is simply to help "kids to represent their understanding." She went on to discuss how strategies can be implemented to help students to "transfer comprehension to another language." We talked about pre-reading strategies for building and accessing students' background knowledge. Cheryl suggested using instructional strategies in a way that "eliminates the barriers that are created when students must write complete sentences and paragraphs in another language." She suggested that students try *mindmapping* and working with vocabulary and ideas through a pre-reading strategy called *Sort and Predict.* She explained that it might be beneficial for students to "access ideas upfront, and then work toward decoding." She also maintained that it is early in the semester, so it is important to "get to know the learners" and "see what they can do in English first" before making too many instructional plans.

With regards to reading materials for Shane's French 11 classes, Cheryl suggested that "primary and intermediate reading materials" might be more accessible for his students. She also suggested Shane use "short nonfiction reads of one page or less." She added that "stories and short books" written for young children can be used and that difficult passages can be rewritten in a way to make them more accessible.

Shane seemed much less anxious after this meeting. I had connected him to someone in his teaching area who would serve as a valuable resource and Shane now had a few instructional ideas to explore in his inquiry.

Clarifying our Focus and Setting Priorities for Literacy Instruction

In analyzing the earliest stages of our inquiry, (and looking for evidence to support my third literacy leadership question which asks, *What is required of a teacher leader in guiding a process of teacher inquiry to improve literacy instruction?*), I can identify several leadership skills that I was beginning to develop. I believe that these leadership skills were important in all of the stages of the inquiry; however, in our earliest stages of building our Literacy Inquiry Team, I believe that these skills were especially fundamental in establishing a collaborative working environment. These skills are:

- The need to be honest and upfront about the level of commitment that is required of inquiry team members
- The ability to create and maintain a safe and respectful environment for sharing and collaborating
- The ability to help establish a shared vision of improvement
- The need to understand that literacy needs are unique to each class
- The need to support teachers in their efforts to improve literacy instruction by connecting them with resources

I also identified two leadership skills which I needed to develop. These skills included:

- The courage to test the members of a team by asking them to look for alternate explanations
- The ability to encourage and support teachers to continue with their efforts when they have decided to abandon their efforts to make instructional improvements

My first research question asks, *What specific changes will teachers make to their teaching?* Although the members of the Literacy Inquiry Team had not yet decided on a focus for improving literacy instruction, there were a wide range of literacy needs that were identified in the first three weeks of September. By our second meeting, on September 28, each of the members of the team had clear ideas of where specific changes could be made. Furthermore, most of us were already beginning to experiment with literacy instructional strategies. In this section I will explain and provide an analysis of our first opportunity to share our data and clarify our focus.

The Literacy Inquiry Team met together for the second time on September 28. We began by reviewing the data we collected over a two week period and sharing any surprises and thoughts we had regarding the literacy needs of our students.

Shane began by focusing on the literacy needs of his Language for Travel 12 class. He was surprised to discover that some of his students had a difficult time answering questions that required them to "interpret the wording" of a question and "make inferences":

> [The question] reads: what is the largest administrative division in France? Would it be the Department, the Commune, or some other division? Well, the paragraph would not say "such and such is the largest division in France." It doesn't say that. It would say "France is divided into 26 regions. These regions are then divided into 100 departments. The departments are divided, blah, blah, blah." So, based on the number of these regions, the students should be able to figure out which is geographically the largest, right? Through inference. Easier said than done.

He shared another activity that students had difficulty with:

> And another [question asked for] the date of the formation of the original French state. It didn't actually say in the paragraph the date of the original French state. It gives a box with three dates in it: Treaty of Verdun , French Revolution, and Fifth Republic . Well, they had to infer "original." Well, maybe that means the first number, right? Which is true. Same eight students ask the same question. I

> thought that was quite interesting. With all of my research activities, they all have questions like that, that require them to think and infer the meaning of the question to find the response.

It is possible that his students struggled to answer this question because they were unable to make a connection between the word "original" and the information that was provided to them in the text. It is also possible that students have become used to answering low level questions and have developed a learned helplessness. Regardless, Shane had identified an area in which he could make instructional improvements. As my first research question asks, *What specific changes will teachers make to their teaching to improve reading and comprehension?,* I was optimistic that Shane might continue to introduce his students to higher level questions and teach his students strategies to enhance their inferential thinking skills; however, as the study continued, Shane chose to make other instructional improvements instead.

After meeting with Cheryl and listening to her suggestions, Shane had begun to think about how he might implement pre and post-reading strategies in his French 11 classes. The students read a story in French and then wrote a response in English. He was interested in seeing how students might react to a story that had the punch line at the end. He was disappointed by the unenthusiastic reaction his French 11 students had to the reading:

> I had the students interpret the story based on the punch lines, this sort of thing. And at the end, usually I get some kind of "a ha!" from the kids, right? See if they can actually identify, based on the reaction when I explain the punch line to them, the different approaches you can take to this punch line interpretation. One class – it was almost a universal – "hey! That's sweet!" They were quite interested in it. The second class, not so much.

Shane attributed the lackluster response of the students to their lack of "motivation" in reading; however, I speculate that there could be other explanations for his students'

negative response to the reading. For example, the material itself might not be that interesting to students. I made a crucial mistake by not asking. This was a missed leadership opportunity as I might have probed further to help Shane to look for other explanations. On analysis, I can see that one of my weaknesses as a leader was that I was worried about pushing the members of my team to explore alternate explanations, and often I was too quick to agree with their perceptions and assumptions. I believe that this is because I did not want to appear confrontational or bossy or that I was in any way challenging their perceptions of their students and the events that took place in their classrooms.

Shane decided that he would like to explore using pre-reading and post-reading strategies and note any effect on students' interest in reading:

> What I would like to see, and maybe not with this particular story, but another one from that book with the punch line again – maybe if I could do a different activity with the kids, using different strategies, to see what kind of an outcome there is there. I don't know. But that was a question I asked myself – just a motivation thing.

I made a note of Shane's intention to make this change to his teaching. Later on in the study, the Literacy Inquiry Team did experiment with pre-reading strategies, including *KWL* (*Know Wonder Learn*) and *KWI* (*Know Wonder Infer*). Although he did not name any specific pre-reading strategies, Shane had already identified a need to build student interest and access background knowledge before students began reading difficult passages.

Terry shared her observations about her students in her Combined Studies 10 class. She asked students about the kinds of nonfiction books they liked to read. After a discussion about "what nonfiction is," her students shared that they liked to read

"biography, crime, and magazines," but they admitted that "they struggle[d] with Biology, anything in Science, [and] anything in Math" that involves "unraveling word problems." At this point, Sharon added, "and that's because Science is just not relevant." By not relevant, I speculate that Sharon was trying to point out that it is often difficult for teachers to explain how information will be useful to students outside of the class in which it is learned.

Terry said that she was "encouraged" that her kids were reading; however, she maintained that her students needed assistance with reading more difficult, content heavy books. She added that matching students to accessible and meaningful texts was important but sometimes students are required to read books that are not particularly interesting or relevant:

> Well, you know, that all comes back to that piece we were talking about; if they don't see relevance, they're not interested. I'm quite encouraged; my kids are churning through books. I see kids in the library all the time taking out books. It's fiction that they like, like *Crank* (Hopkins, 2004) or any of that stuff – they'll plough through that and like it. But I think that the key for a lot of these students is matching the right kind of nonfiction reading with the kids – getting them over that, you know, sometimes you have to read things that are not particularly interesting, but you still have to read it for information. And that's where I'm going with this now. A lot of them do not like to read nonfiction because it's hard for them, but they don't see it as particularly relevant. Although, when I asked them, "do you think it's important for you to become a good reader?" they said "Yes." I asked "Why?" "Because we need to read to get it [information]."

I believe Terry makes a good point here. Terry was suggesting that our role as teachers is not only to impart knowledge but to help students to become better readers and learners. Her students seemed to understand this connection between reading and learning and that reading only improves with practice.

Terry also asked her students what they do when they do not understand what they are reading. She was not that surprised to discover that her students do not know of any strategies to help repair their comprehension:

> Most of them said "I'll just reread it or I'll ask for help." You know, ultimately, you want to get to get kids to a place where they can figure out meaning is on their own using context. And not too many of them are saying, "I look at the words around it and I try to think about what this means."

Although rereading is a strategy, as is asking for help, it was clear that Terry believed that students could learn more effective strategies to repair their comprehension. She also believed that once students had learned these strategies, most could learn to monitor their comprehension and use repair strategies on their own.

Terry shared that she was having "success" teaching her students how to discover the contextual meanings of vocabulary words. She added that her ESL (English Second Language) students found this strategy particularly useful, as do other students in her class who have a limited vocabulary:

> A lot of the students are able to access more words than they actually use using context clues. For example, today we were looking at the *The Odyssey* and the students were to highlight certain words, and one word was "staff," as in "he grabbed the staff and shot the Cyclops in the eye with it." My ESL kids were a little bit mixed up. And one of my non-ESL kids just wrote down "people that work in a place." And I had to say, "OK. Let's go back to that piece." And as soon as you looked at it you got that a staff was a pointed stick, right? But he didn't use context clues so he didn't have a word. And as soon as he used context clues he was fine. And I use that all the time because ESL kids really struggle.

She also had been working with her students to improve their note taking. She maintained that her students were "pretty good at finding the main idea" of a piece of text but they have difficulty "prioritizing details." Although her students were still working to improve their skills, she was making some progress in teaching students to locate

important details, as well as words that they did not know, and mark the text with highlighters as they read:

> Even kids who fancy themselves as quite good readers will highlight absolutely everything. And so I'm sort of limiting the kids, and I say you can only highlight two sentences in this paragraph and so on. I have a couple of ESL kids - and we were doing something where I had them highlight certain words I was pretty sure they wouldn't know - but ESL kids will highlight every word they do not know. So they're pretty good at this.

I mentioned to the group that I think that there are adults who have a hard time marking text for main idea. I suggested that one has only to look at how university students mark their textbooks; many students will highlight absolutely everything. Shane agreed, and shared with the team that he was "still highlighting everything" when he was in his second year of university. One of my leadership actions was to suggest an instructional strategy that I had learned as I was developing my literature review. I suggested that the *magnet word strategy* is a good one because it sets limits on what students can select in the text to show importance or main idea. Teachers using this strategy ask students to read a passage and then highlight only the most important words. Afterwards, students are asked to pick five or ten words that best express the main idea of this piece. In returning to my third literacy leadership question, *What is required of a teacher leader in guiding a process of teach inquiry to improve literacy instruction*?, I have learned that sharing strategies that I have read about, learned from others, or I have tried is important. Likewise, encouraging other members of the Literacy Inquiry Team to share strategies that were part of their own teaching repertoire was an important part of guiding the teacher inquiry process.

Sharon shared with the Literacy Inquiry Team the data she collected after asking her Family Studies 12 class about their attitudes towards reading:

> I have twenty-seven girls and three boys. But I have twelve students who read for pleasure at least five times a week, and four kids who read at least three times a week, three who read at least one time per week, and the rest claim to not read at all. After I thought, only ten in a class of thirty that don't read; I thought that was pretty good.

Although only nineteen of her students read regularly for pleasure, Sharon was not concerned that eight of her students claimed that they did not read at all. Sharon's "main frustration" was with student writing. This likely explains why, over the course of this study, most of her instructional changes were designed to improve writing and encourage students to make inferences and connections; improving reading was not a priority for Sharon.

She explained to the Literacy Inquiry Team that writing assignments were too brief and students needed assistance with the basic mechanics of writing a multi paragraph composition. After a great deal of teacher modeling and assistance, she did see some improvement:

> We do a lot of journals with Family Studies, like we'll do a study and then I'll do a journal about how they're feeling or experiencing or understanding. And so the first journal that I gave them was a nightmare…Every student handed in just one big block of writing. And so the [next] time we did journals we talked about paragraphs. You should have a topic sentence, a concluding sentence and so on. For the most part there were no transitions between the paragraphs. So then we get to the third journal and I actually demonstrated a journal…I showed them a topic sentence, paragraphs, this is how you transition. After I did that, I circulated around the room to help students. So, still very little transitioning going on between paragraphs, but for the most part it's better.

After one particular group assignment, she was also discouraged by her students' inability to demonstrate that they made a meaningful connection between course material and their own lives:

> I broke them up into six groups and I gave each one a task of presenting this information by doing a skit or a song or a cheer or something, kind of a fun way of presenting it. And it was like pulling teeth. It was about looking at this

> [information in one of the chapters of the textbook] and trying to figure out what this theory was saying, even though I had gone through and showed them everything it was saying. Just being able to infer what it was they were talking about in here to what that meant in their own life. It was a very difficult task for them. The presentations were pretty shoddy. It didn't go very well. I don't want to give them a test on this stuff. I don't want to assess them that way. I don't want them to memorize stuff, but to show they understand.

Although students were not successful with the group presentation activity, when students were asked to do a more structured writing activity they had a much easier time demonstrating a personal connection to the course material:

> The last thing I did was we watched a movie and then we did some poems that have to do with that. They were given a template (I will, I am, I know, explain) and then they think about things in their life that they want to change and write a about it. And these turned out very well. This was definitely relevant for them.

As my second literacy leadership question asks, *What are teacher's views on the success of [instructional] changes*?, I was interested in hearing Sharon's perceptions about why these simple changes were effective. Sharon's perception of her experience was that students do a much better job of expressing themselves if the expectations of the task are well defined. She added that simple tasks, such as writing a short poem, which is much more private than group activities such as dramatic skits, are "less risky ways for students to express something personal about themselves." Simple instructional changes were already helping her students make inferences and connect course content to their lives. I was optimistic that Sharon would continue to explore more of these instructional strategies over the course of the semester, although I was also hoping that she would find opportunities to encourage her students to read more.

Natalie had been working to improve literacy instruction in her Art 11 and 12 classes and her Social Studies 10 classes. After asking her students about their reading interests, she was quite surprised to discover that, although most of her grade eleven and

twelve Art students often read for pleasure, her grade ten Social Studies students "looked at [her] like she was crazy that [she'd] even ask about reading books." Nevertheless, although Natalie's perception was that "it was definitely uncool to talk about reading" in her Social Studies 10 class, after observing this class over the last couple of weeks she was pleased with her students' content knowledge and their willingness to read from the textbook for long periods of time. Natalie seemed to suggest that what students say does not always match what they can do:

> But when I make them read the textbook, I start reading it and they can then take over, reading it out loud if they want to, or when they read quietly they are very quiet. They'll read for over half an hour. They seem to know a lot. They say they don't have time to read because of work and school, but they know a lot about things around them. So I think they probably don't realize how much they read. But they ask some really good questions about the things we discuss. But they say they're not into reading and they're definitely not nonfiction readers.

Although many of Natalie's Art students enjoy reading for pleasure, Natalie discovered that her students do not enjoy reading nonfiction books for class. She explained that "taking notes [from these books] and putting things into their own words" can be a "struggle," and instead of reading to "find out what this art form is about," sometimes students will ask Natalie to "read to them." She described this process as "painful." She decided that she would try to improve her students' reading and note taking skills and knowledge of art by encouraging them to find art books that look interesting and inviting them to bring them to class. Natalie said that she was "excited" about incorporating a more thoughtful literacy program with her Art students; however, as you shall read later in the study, she found it difficult to find interesting and accessible reading materials that met the diverse learning needs of her students, and so she quickly abandoned her efforts to implement a reading program with her Art 11 and 12 classes.

Looking back, I find it interesting that, although her students said they enjoyed reading fiction, she did not consider using fictional reads in her Art classes. For instance, I wonder if she might have considered inviting her students to read illustrated books or graphic novels to encourage reading texts while maintaining a focus on art. Instead, she chose to focus her attention on making instructional improvements with her Social Studies 10 class. In retrospect, this was another missed leadership opportunity. I feel that I might have done more to assist Natalie with finding resources or I might have helped connect Natalie to teachers who have had success with introducing a reading program in an Art class.

At this first meeting, I was also optimistic about taking a new approach to literacy instruction with my English Language Arts 11 and 12 classes and my grade eight Reading Support Program. After asking my students to tell me if they enjoyed reading and what kinds of books they preferred, I was not surprised by student responses. Most of my English Language Arts 11 and 12 students enjoyed reading for pleasure. Most students enjoyed fiction more than nonfiction, and fantasy, horror, and science fiction were easily the most popular choices for novels among my grade eleven and twelve students. If they must read nonfiction, students stated that they would choose books that closely match their hobbies and interests, such as books about horses and cars.

The students in my Reading Support Program had a mixed reaction to these questions. Of the twelve students in the class, four of them (all boys) reported that they did not enjoy reading at all. All of the students in this class reported that they would much rather read fiction than nonfiction. Students reported that they enjoyed novels such as *Twilight* (Meyers, 2005) and *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1997) and almost all of the

students reported that they did not enjoy reading books that are nonfiction, although all of the students said that they enjoyed reading magazines. Afterwards, I asked students if they felt as if they were given enough time in each of their classes to read. All of the students said no. This was really not surprising as my experience with these students was that it often took them about ten minutes just to settle into silent reading. Because they were slow readers and were easily distracted, they required plenty of time and a quiet environment for reading. Most of the students said that they found the reading material in Science and Social Studies more difficult than reading in English Language Arts or elective classes such as Foods, Drama, and Industrial Education.

I had planned to make some simple instructional improvements this semester. The goal for all of my classes was to match students to books and to provide plenty of choice and time for reading both fiction and nonfiction. I shared with the Literacy Inquiry Team my objective to increase the volume of reading each of my classes. I also shared my thoughts about how I intended to adapt my courses for ESL (English Second Language) students and struggling readers so that materials would be more accessible. For a few of my students, the novels that were suggested in our English department's Scope and Sequence document presented too great of a challenge. In addition to having my students choose their own books for silent reading, while the rest of the class was working together on stories and books that I had selected, I decided to suggest more accessible stories and novels to some students. The Scope and Sequence stated that some of these readings were intended for use with our grade eight or nine students but there was nothing in the curriculum that mandated that teachers must use specific books for specific grades. All of my students still had to complete all of the written assignments and do so at

a level that met the expectations of the course, otherwise their grade must reflect a level of success with a modified curriculum.

After sharing our initial observations, we brainstormed a list of factors and variables that we decided were most relevant to improving literacy in our classes. We then decided that we would edit our list of variables down to include only those that we believed were the most important. We also decided to focus only on those variables that we had some influence on in our classrooms. For example, we decided that since we had no control over the number of hours that students were working part-time jobs, that we would remove this item from our list. This edited list of variables is reprinted in Figure 8.

What are the most significant factors and variables that will need to be addressed if I am to help improve literacy in my classroom?

1. Relevant and accessible reading materials. Also, plenty of student choice.
2. Note taking skills. Teaching students to prioritize information.
3. Help students to improve their attitudes toward reading. Also, transfer skills from [English Language Arts class] to other classes.
4. Teach students to make inferences and connections to their own lives (as well as other books, films, etc).
5. Encourage students to read more and widely (including more non-fiction reading).
6. Show students what they can do when they lose comprehension.

Figure 8. Literacy improvement: our edited list of factors and variables.

Next, the Literacy Inquiry Team worked to "clarify our beliefs about the relative importance" of these factors and variables by creating a graphic representation called a "priority pie" (Sagor 2000, p. 15). Our priority pie is reprinted in Figure 9.

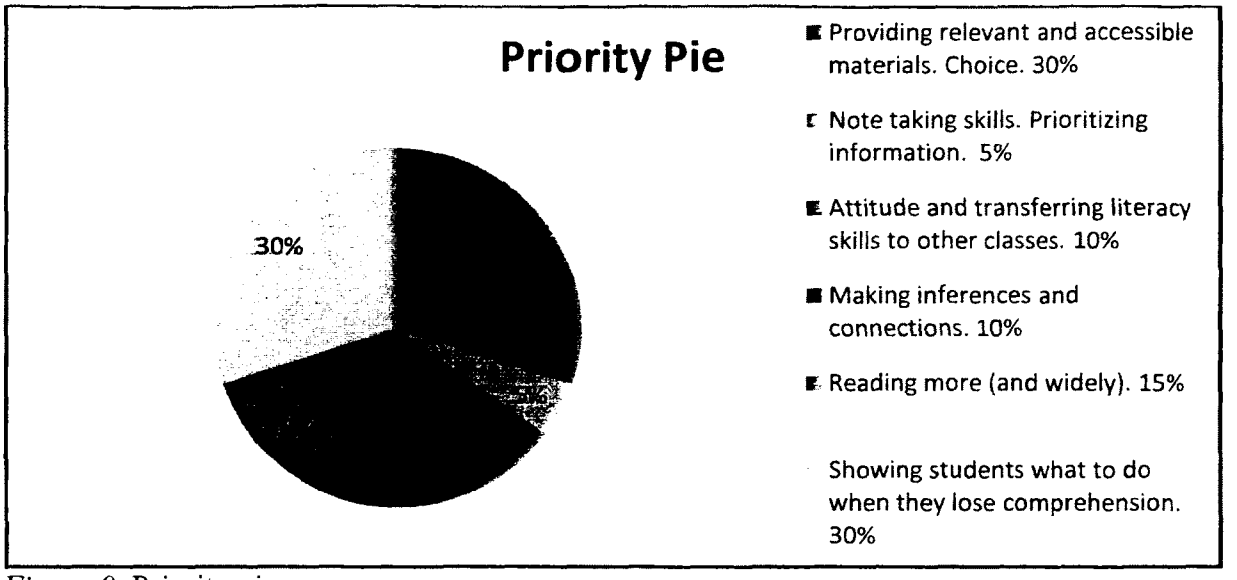

Figure 9. Priority pie.

Preparing our Research Questions and a Data Collection Plan

The priority pie was instrumental in helping us to decide where to focus our efforts for making instructional improvements. An important leadership action was to use the results of the Priority Pie to guide me in selecting pertinent resources that met the needs of the Literacy Inquiry Team. After our September 28 meeting, I invited the members of the Literacy Inquiry Team to read several chapters of Gear's (2008) book, *Nonfiction Reading Power: Teaching Students How to Think While They Read All Kinds of Information.* I suggested that the team review the chapter titled *The Power to Question/Infer* because we decided that teaching students to make inferences and to make connections accounted for 10% of our priority pie. In another chapter, titled *The Power to Connect*, Gear discussed strategies for teaching students to make connections. I suggested that the members of the Literacy Inquiry Team read this chapter as well. Even though note taking skills and skills for prioritizing information only accounted for 5% of our priority pie, I suggested that we read the chapter titled *The Power to Determine Importance* because when we shared our observations earlier, each of the members of the

Literacy Inquiry Team mentioned that their students need assistance with this skill. By including this chapter, I was not overruling the results of the priority pie, but rather supporting the members of the team in an area that was obviously a common concern. Also, Gear provided several strategies that looked useful.

I was optimistic that Gear's (2008) book would provide each team member with several instructional strategies that we could discuss when we met again in mid October. I was aware that two of the larger issues represented in our priority pie, teaching students what to do when they lose comprehension, and providing accessible reading materials, would be ongoing concerns that we would need to address throughout the semester. In the meantime, I invited each of the Literacy Inquiry Team members to read the literature, and then to generate three classroom inquiry questions that he or she would use to guide his or her efforts to implement improved literacy instruction over the course of this semester. In retrospect, I should have initiated a conversation about how we might increase reading volume, as "reading more" accounted for 15% of our priority pie. I anticipated that each member of the team would make instructional changes to include more reading; however, this was not the case with every member of the team.

I shared with the Literacy Inquiry Team a method for checking the readability of reading materials using Microsoft Word. The members of the team found this method easy and effective. After locating a section of text that is roughly representative of the book you are measuring and typing a paragraph or two into the word processor, Word calculates both a Flesch Reading Ease score and a Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level. The Flesch Reading Ease score is a text's readability score based on a 100 point scale. A

score of 100 is the easiest to read and a score of less than 29 is the most difficult. The Flesch Reading Ease scale has been reprinted in Figure 10.

Flesch Reading Score	Readability
0-29	Very Difficult
30-49	Difficult
50-59	Fairly Difficult
60-69	Standard
70-79	Fairly Easy
80-89	Easy
90-100	Very Easy

(http://rfptemplates.technologyevaluation.com/Readability-Scores/Flesch-Reading-Ease-Readability-Score.html).
Figure 10. Flesch reading ease scale.

The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level is the approximate reading comprehension level of a text. If a text has a Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level of 8.2, it is anticipated that the text can be read and understood by someone who is reading at the grade eight level.

We measured many of the texts that we were using to teach our classes. We were interested in knowing the approximate Flesch Reading Scores as well as the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Levels but we also decided that it was important to examine the features of texts, such as graphic organizers, glossaries, subheadings, and bold-faced fonts that indicate key words. We also wanted to consider other things that make books accessible for readers, including the quality of the examples that were given and the background knowledge that might be necessary to fully understand the text. We were also aware that some texts contain information that is culturally specific, which makes texts less

accessible for our ESL (English Second Language) students. The results for the readability and accessibility of our texts are displayed in Appendix A.

It is curious that the *Horizons* (Cranny, 1999) text that Terry used to teach Combined Studies 10 and Natalie used to teach Social Studies 10 scored low in terms of its readability for grade ten students. Examining only the text's Flesch Reading Score (28.4) and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level (12) might lead to the conclusion that this book is very difficult to read and that it is a better fit for a student who is reading at the grade twelve level; however, these numbers are somewhat misleading. *Horizons* contains vocabulary that students might not be introduced to in other classes. Difficult words such as "globalization" and "macroeconomics" and many other terms are frequently used in this text, and as a result, the book measures high on the Flesch Reading Score and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level. In actuality, the text is supplemented with many text features, including graphic organizers, clear examples, and definitions whenever new terms are introduced to the reader. New terms are also bold-faced. Both Terry and Natalie agreed that students in grade ten have no difficulty reading the *Horizons* text. We learned that the best analysis of our texts includes a measurement of reading scores and grade levels but also takes into account text features and the book's relevance to students. We also agreed that our students can communicate when a book is too difficult to read.

Sharing our Inquiry Questions

At this stage, I had already identified skills that I had demonstrated through my leadership actions and areas in which I needed to improve. I have provided a list of newly acquired leadership skills and goal areas in Figure 11. A summary of leadership skills,

learning, and goal areas through all of the stages of the inquiry is provided in Appendix B.

Demonstrated Leadership Skills

- Providing a sequence of steps for collaborative inquiry
- Encouraging team members to share their instructional strategies
- Assisting members of the team by suggesting strategies I have read about in the literature. Also, selecting and suggesting readings and encouraging teachers to discover other instructional strategies in the literature
- Guiding the team in brainstorming and prioritizing instructional improvements
- Providing the team with a method of assessing the accessibility of reading materials

Goal Areas for Leadership Growth

- Encouraging the Literacy Inquiry Team to explore making improvements based each of the top priorities of our pie (for example, increasing reading volume)

Figure 11. Leadership skills and goal areas, October 15.

The members of the team had also begun to think about instructional changes they would make this semester (my first literacy leadership question). I was optimistic that the members of the Literacy Inquiry Team would find some useful instructional strategies in the chapters that I had suggested for them to read. Furthermore, each of the members of the team learned to assess the readability and accessibility of reading materials.

After we had two weeks to read some of the literature and to examine our books, the Literacy Inquiry Team met for the third time on October 15. This meeting was an opportunity to share our classroom inquiry questions and to discuss how we might collect data sources in an effort to answer each of our classroom inquiry questions. In analyzing my findings, I realize that I made a critical error by asking each of my participants to

create three unique classroom inquiry questions. First of all, speaking from my perspective as the principal researcher and a participant, the data that was gathered in our attempts to answer all of these questions was overwhelming. Secondly, because our classroom inquiry questions were unique to our teaching situations, I feel that the Literacy Inquiry Team did not work as collaboratively as we might have had we worked on answering the same questions, or in somehow contributing part of the answer to a common umbrella question. Finally, I believe that I could have done more to encourage the members of the team to narrow and focus their classroom inquiry questions. Looking back, this part of the study highlights an important part of my leadership learning, as I would not use this approach again. Instead, I would work with my participants to create a single set of classroom inquiry questions that are more closely connected to the questions that are guiding the study. For example, because I wanted to know "what specific instructional changes teachers will make to their teaching to improve literacy," as a team we might have asked ourselves "how will students respond to specific instructional changes made to improve literacy."

I began this meeting by sharing my own classroom inquiry questions, printed in Figure 12. My questions tended to focus more on reading, simply because my grade eights were struggling readers and many of these students did not read very much, especially nonfiction. I shared my intention to carry out this inquiry in my grade eleven and twelve English Language Arts classes as well, as many of my students in these classes had suggested that they did not have enough time for reading in their classes, and like the grade eights, many of these students did not really enjoy reading nonfiction texts. I was particularly interested in seeing what effect there would be if I made nonfiction

reading time an important part of the daily routine and I armed my students with strategies to show me their thinking as they read.

1. What is the relationship between students' enjoyment of reading and the time they are given in school for silent reading?
2. What effect will comprehension strategies have on helping students to better remember what they read and repair their understanding of texts?
3. What evidence is there that exposing students to more nonfiction texts, with plenty of choice and time for reading, will lead them to become better readers of more difficult texts? What evidence suggests that they enjoy reading nonfiction?

Figure 12. Steve's classroom inquiry questions.

Next, Terry shared her classroom inquiry questions with the team, as presented in Figure 13.

1. What effect will pre-reading strategies have on student comprehension of nonfiction texts?
2. What effect is there on reading comprehension when students are taught a range of literacy strategies?
3. If I use specific reference to improve inference, what effect will this have on student's scores on formative assessments?

Figure 13. Terry's classroom inquiry questions.

Natalie shared that one of her "big hurdles in Socials and Art [was] that students did not think that reading and writing are Socials or Art things" but rather something that is done in English Language Arts classes. She explained that she was having a difficult time getting them to take writing assignments seriously:

> They don't ever want to do any writing... Even writing letters the other day, their letters were bad. A lot of them came in point form. The students just said, 'These are the four things I wanted to talk about.

She decided that her first classroom inquiry question would address a need to make reading and writing a priority in her classes. Natalie did not have a third classroom inquiry question. Her classroom inquiry questions are displayed in Figure 14.

1. How do I show students that it is important that they are reading the text properly, they are looking for words they don't know, and are writing properly?

2. How might breaking down information into a poster format encourage students to find and learn key information?

Figure 14. Natalie's classroom inquiry questions.

It is worth noting that I have not changed the language that the participants used in their questions. Natalie uses the term "properly" when speaking about reading and writing; however, it is unclear what "properly" means to her. One of the leadership actions that I plan to work on is probing the members of the team for a more precise understanding of the language they use in their both their questions and their interpretations of the data. I interpreted the word "proper" to mean reading and writing expectations that are similar to those used in English Language Arts classes. I see that it is the responsibility of the leader of the inquiry team to assure that the team members prepare questions that are clear and unambiguous.

Shane had two classroom inquiry questions. He had already decided that the focus of his inquiry would be on "reading and writing," although he added that "speaking and being able to use the language" was part of this as well. He had no plans to increase reading volume, but rather to focus his inquiry on the effectiveness of using reading comprehension strategies in his French 11 class:

> That's one of the things I'm really wanting to focus on – changing the way I teach reading, changing the way in which my students read, from reading to find English answers to reading and integrating the target language. This is not what they're doing now. So by using these reading strategies, will that increase comprehension?

He had also been experimenting with paragraph writing templates with his Beginner Spanish 11 class. He was curious to know what the effect would be on student writing if

students learned to use a writing template with clear criteria for scoring and continued to practice using the template over several weeks:

> So, rather than giving my kids just an assignment and saying, "write about what you like," give them a sample paragraph. I started this today; I gave them one. And I said, 'OK. Here's a template of a paragraph, with just the bare minimum things I'm expecting you to be able to do. If you take that paragraph and reword it, like take out words and put in your own, and nothing more, you'll get six out of ten. That's about 60% of what I expect you to be able to do. If you change the words, but also add more sentences to it, and ask questions, because they had to write a letter to a pen pal and ask questions of their pen pal, that's how you get your mark to go higher.'

I have displayed Shane's classroom inquiry questions in Figure 15.

1. In what ways will the use of different reading strategies or a specific reading strategy increase comprehension of reading passages in French 11?
2. In what ways will providing paragraph templates increase quality of written assignments in Beginner Spanish?

Figure 15. Shane's classroom inquiry questions.

Sharon was also interested in improving student writing. Like Natalie, she used the vague and somewhat teacher-centered word "proper" when she was describing writing expectations. Once again, I might have suggested that she use a more precise phrase such as "standardized writing expectations," or "common writing expectations," or "writing expectations that are similar to those that students learn in English Language Arts classes" after she shared her first classroom inquiry question. Sharon expressed a frustration similar to Natalie's; it was difficult to convince her students to take their writing seriously, or least to write with the same attention to detail as they would in their English Language Arts classes. Along with improving writing, her other goal was to see how she might make use of some instructional strategies to help students to build on and connect to background knowledge and to make inferences in their discussions and writing. I was pleased that several members of the Literacy Inquiry Team had chosen connections and inferences as

part of his or her research focus; the group had identified this as a priority in September. Sharon's classroom inquiry questions are presented in Figure 16.

1. What evidence is there that having 'proper' writing expectations in elective classes will improve written work?
2. What evidence is there that discussing prior knowledge of a subject encourages students to infer in their writing?
3. What evidence is there that multiple drafts of the same assignment will improve writing?

Figure 16. Sharon's classroom inquiry questions.

I did not think that Sharon's third classroom inquiry question was very thoughtful; the results of this inquiry would be too predictable. Nevertheless, I decided that this question was meaningful for her as she was trying to include more formative assessment in her teaching. I also believed that the data would support her first question, so I did not urge Sharon to reconsider it. I did not want the members of the team to feel as though they had to focus on three questions. In fact, Shane and Natalie had only two classroom inquiry questions, but they were meaningful questions that guided them in making instructional improvements.

Building a Data Collection Plan

After we had time to share our classroom inquiry questions, I presented the team with a sample data "Triangulation Matrix" chart as suggested by Sagor (2000, p. 21). We also had a discussion that generated a list of possible data sources. This list was not exhaustive but did include a wide range of possible ways to collect data, including surveys, observations, grade books, interviews, anecdotal notes, student journals, and drafts of student work or student portfolios. I explained that validity is vital in collecting accurate data and that the purpose of the matrix is to ensure that each of us has a

triangulated data collection plan. I explained that the data can come from "basic sources" but that "we need to collect three sources of data for each of our questions."

I suggested to the team that we should wait a few days before we commit to a data collection plan. I wanted each member to have the opportunity to revisit their classroom inquiry questions, and if necessary, to make changes. I later emailed them a template that they could use to record their classroom inquiry questions and their data collection plan. Looking back, although I wanted the members of the Literacy Inquiry Team to base their conclusions on data, I see that our data collection plan was overwhelming. I was concerned about validity, but we had too many questions and some of our questions were vague or difficult to answer accurately with the available data.

Before each of us set off on a quest to answer our own classroom inquiry questions, I decided that it might be useful for the team to begin by making one common question, as well as a data collection plan for that one question. This was an important leadership action. Focusing on a single classroom inquiry question helped to establish common ground to bring the group together. Furthermore, this was a way to reduce some anxiety with the participants before *gradually relinquishing responsibility* (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) from the larger group to tackle our classroom inquiry questions independently. I made a suggestion that we think of a single question that is common to all of us, regardless of our teaching areas, as well as an instructional strategy that we could all try over the next two weeks:

> Can we think of one [classroom inquiry] question that would be common for the whole team – something that we could all work on, just to see what happens when we're all on the same page and collecting the same data? Also, perhaps we can think of one strategy that we can all try, to help us to get at the data and hopefully answer a common research question.

Terry suggested that "looking at nonfiction [made] sense" as we all used a variety of nonfiction texts throughout the semester. In brainstorming questions that were universal to our teaching areas, Terry offered, "How about *What effect will using before-reading strategies have on student comprehension of nonfiction text*?" We agreed that Terry's suggestion to use strategies to access prior knowledge was a good starting point because it was meaningful for everyone on the team, simple enough that each of us could gather meaningful data in two short weeks, and it would provide the team with some common understanding about classroom inquiry questions and data collection. We anticipated that our shared experiences working with pre-reading strategies would make for meaningful conversation at our next meeting.

The Literacy Inquiry Team decided that there are several good pre-reading strategies in Gear's (2008) book and therefore, many ways to encourage students to access background knowledge. Shane also expressed some interest in the *THIEVES* strategy. I suggested that although this is a good strategy for determining the importance of information in texts, that "this might be something [he] could look at after we've all had a chance to work with strategies for accessing background knowledge." I did not intend to discourage Shane, but rather to keep the members of the Literacy Inquiry Team focused on trying one common and simple task before each of us moved on to more complex tasks. Helping to keep the team focused on the sequence of tasks to be accomplished in our plan was an important leadership action.

Terry was interested in trying the *KWI* strategy (Know, Wonder, and Infer). She said she preferred *KWI* to Gear's (2008) OWI (Observe, Wonder, and Infer) strategy:

> I prefer *KWI* to OWI, which is know, wonder and infer. *What do you already know about this?*, as what students know about it is part of the pre-reading strategy. And, once students have read it, what can they infer?

Shane said he still liked to teach the strategy as *KWL* (Know, Wonder, and Learn). Although students demonstrate deeper thinking by making inferences, he added that this strategy does encourage students to, at the very least, share "what they have learned after they have read" from a text. Terry added that she feels that it is important for her to ask students to make inferences because "they can pull out literal meaning from reading, but making inferences is brutal." Shane agreed that helping students to make inferences is important and that eventually he would like his students "to be able to do that in French." He added that he "likes the infer part because...it takes comprehension into a different direction." I suggested that each of us use what works best for us, and emphasized the importance of "beginning with background knowledge so that students are reading with a purpose, with questions in mind as they are reading." Some of us might wish to know what students have learned while others might move on to "encourage students to make inferences and connections." As the team leader, I had suggested that we focus on a common interest but I encouraged varying approaches. I believe that this leadership action was a good way to help us to find common ground considering the wide range of teaching areas that were represented by the members of the Literacy Inquiry Team.

The team had a conversation about the kinds of data we should collect as we were teaching pre-reading strategies. I was pleased that everyone was willing to share suggestions, not just me as the team leader; I could see that we were starting to build a culture of support and to work effectively as a collaborative team. Terry offered that one source of data might come from simply asking the students, "Did this help you? Did

using this process help you to understand?" I added that students could "journal about this" if they are reluctant to share their thoughts with the entire class. Shane suggested that we could even ask students to put up their hands to indicate whether or not they understood. Terry added that "we should have a written piece" as well because "that's how we'll know what they know." Because we were interested in knowing what students have learned or how their thinking has changed, it made sense that we should collect samples of student writing. Terry pointed out that we would "see the improvement when we compared it with other things that they have done." She also wondered if we should have students do two samples of writing - one before teaching the strategy and one after - so that "we have something to compare it with." I suggested that we could also record observational data in our journals as anecdotal comments. Anecdotal data about the effectiveness of the strategy might come from observations about whether "students seem like they are less frustrated with challenging readings" after we have taught the strategy. Are students "checking out, and are you constantly reminding them to get back to the reading" or are students "more focused after using the pre-reading strategy?"

The Literacy Inquiry Team made a triangulated data matrix for our classroom inquiry on pre-reading strategies. It is presented in Figure 17.

Inquiry Question	Data Source #1	Data Source #2	Data Source #3
What effect will using pre-reading strategies have on student comprehension of non-fiction text?	Discussion with students (asking students "does this help?")	Collect and compare two writing samples (one sample before teaching the strategy and one after).	Observational data – anecdotal comments recorded in our journals.

Figure 17. Triangulation matrix – classroom inquiry on pre-reading strategies.

Our final task for this meeting was to brainstorm and chart tasks that needed to be accomplished in order to implement our pre-reading instructional strategies as well as

identify any additional supports that might be needed. We also set a timeline for accomplishing this phase of the inquiry process. I have identified this as an important leadership action for three reasons: a) by setting timelines for each task, the team could plan their instruction accordingly; b) when members of the team were at a similar stage of the plan (for example, they had just assessed the writing from the first writing assignment), they could have a meaningful conversation about their experiences before moving on to the next stage; c) although the members of the team had no difficulty with their efforts to implement pre-reading strategies and collect data, our schedule was useful because I was also able to ask members of the team if they needed additional support at each stage of the plan. Our "Data Collection Timeline/To-Do List" chart is displayed in Figure 18 (Sagor, 2000, p. 117).

I felt confident that we were making progress. Initially, I was nervous about this part of the inquiry because each of us would be responsible for collecting a significant amount of data to support each of our questions. Each classroom inquiry question felt like a significant commitment. Nevertheless, the team seemed energized by the challenge, and after I shared a list of possible data sources, I believe that I alleviated any fears that the data would be difficult for members of the team to analyze and interpret. In my opinion, this meeting as well the next one (when we met to discuss our classroom inquiry into teaching pre-reading strategies), were the most powerful. It is clear to me that the team was collaborative because we were working toward the same common goals. There was certainly collaboration throughout the rest of the inquiry (we still had a common focus on making improvements to teaching literacy), but because each of us were working on unique classroom inquiry questions, we were doing more sharing than collaborating.

Classroom Inquiry Question	Strategies We Are Considering	Tasks That Need to Be Accomplished	Target Date for Accomplishing It	Supports That Might be Needed
What effect will using pre-reading strategies have on student comprehension of non-fiction text?	*KWI*, *KWL*, OWI , Mind-Maps or Wonder Webs, Wonder and Infer, Text Questions and Inferences	Gather resources (a collection of non-fiction reading passages).	October 20, 2009	
		Learn the strategy. Perhaps talk to others who have experience with using the strategy.	Before teaching the strategy on October 22, 2009	Assistance from Terry (our school literacy coach).
		Teach the strategy	October 22, 2009, and then ongoing	
		Collect the first writing sample	October 21, 2009	
		Collect the Second Writing Sample	October 28, 2009	
		Gather Observational Data	Ongoing	
		Ask students about their thoughts about using the strategy	October 28, 2009	

Figure 18. Data collection timeline/to-do list.

Our First Changes to Instruction: Experimenting With Pre-reading Strategies

I am beginning this section by returning to my third research question, *What is required of a teacher leader in guiding a process of teacher inquiry to improve literacy instruction?* After analyzing the findings from our meeting on October 15, I could see that I had demonstrated six new leadership actions. I also identified areas that required

further development. In Figure 19, I have included a list of new leadership learning and goal areas at this stage of the inquiry.

New Leadership Learning

- Establishing a common focus to bring the group together
- Supporting the members of team as we gradually relinquish responsibility and members begin to work independently
- Structuring and sequencing tasks, simple to complex and setting timelines for completing them
- Encouraging varied approaches while maintaining a common team focus
- Developing a culture of support in which other members of the team feel confident in making suggestions to guide the team's efforts
- Creating a data driven system to measure improvement

New Goal Areas for Leadership Growth

- Testing the members of a team by asking them to look for alternate explanations
- Encouraging and supporting teachers to continue with their efforts when they have decided to abandon their efforts to make instructional improvements
- Probing members of the team for clarification and precision
- Assuring that the team members prepare research questions that are clear and unambiguous

Figure 19. Leadership skills and goal areas, October 29.

The Literacy Inquiry Team met together for the fourth time on October 29 to share our findings. The team agreed that each of us would begin this phase of the data collection by having our students read a short nonfiction article and then asking them to write a short summary or personal response. Next, we were to make our first changes to how we teach literacy by experimenting with pre-reading strategies, such as *KWL* or *KWI*, in our classrooms over a period of two weeks, with the aim of helping students to connect to their reading by first accessing background knowledge and then encouraging students to make thoughtful pre-reading questions. We were to assess the learning again at the end of the two week period to see if there was any improvement in the thoughtfulness of students' written summaries and responses.

Although each of the members of the Literacy Inquiry Team made similar changes to his or her teaching by experimenting with either *KWL* or *KWI*, each of the participants adapted the strategy in different ways to fit the needs of the content area and the specific lesson being taught. For example, after teaching the strategy, Shane adapted the writing activity by setting strict time limits in order to "force an economy of words." Natalie used *KWL* as a way to build background knowledge before brainstorming topics for a writing assignment. Terry found ways to use the *KWL* strategy as a pre-reading activity and a way to help her students focus on the mechanics of paragraph writing. Sharron used *KWL* as a strategy to encourage her students to focus on what they learned and to avoid copying from the textbook. I adapted the *KWL* strategy by teaching students to chart important details and interesting things that were learned from the reading.

In this section I have provided a detailed description and analysis of each of our experiences with teaching *KWL*. Because my second literacy leadership inquiry question asks, *What are teacher's views on the success of [instructional] changes?*, each subsection begins with a summary of the participant's perceptions.

Shane's Perceptions of the *KWL* Strategy

Shane was experimenting with teaching the KWL strategy to his French 11 students. He discovered that the strategy took some time to teach; however, after making a few adaptations to how he taught the strategy, he admitted that the KWL strategy was useful because he could gauge what his students had learned from the reading. He did not feel that the first activity, when students simply read and wrote a summary, was very effective. Shane's perceptions, both before and after teaching the *KWL* strategy, are summarized in Figure 20.

Shane's perceptions of student writing before teaching the *KWL* strategy:

- The first writing activity was "frustrating."
- Students had difficulty deciding whether information in the reading was important or not.
- It took too long for students to complete the first writing assignment.
- Many students were simply translating from French to English and not writing thoughtful responses.
- There was no way to assess whether or not students understood the reading.

Shane's perceptions of student writing after teaching the *KWL* strategy:

- After setting time limits on writing, the activity did not take too much time. (There was still a perception that activities such as *KWL* should not take up too much class time).
- *KWL* was useful because students could demonstrate their learning after learning the strategy.

Figure 20. Shane's perceptions, both before and after teaching the *KWL* strategy.

Gathering the preliminary data before teaching the *KWL* strategy was a frustrating experience for Shane. Asking students to read an article in French and then to summarize in English "took the entire period" because students did not know how to decide which facts in the article were important and which were not:

> What I found was that the tendency was to want to state every fact that was learned. There was a nonfiction article about sport organizations in Canada with the origins of organized sports. What I ended up getting were full page single spaced - for an article that has half a page in the textbook - from many of them.

After looking at the writing, Shane decided that student summary responses read more like direct "English translations" of the French article, and that after this activity he still could not assess whether students really understood the reading. Shane added that, because it appeared that this approach was also not very helpful for students, he would never try this activity again:

> It took the entire period. From start to finish I couldn't even give a post activity to gauge their basic comprehension of what they read. So I still don't know what their reading comprehension was for that article. And I thought, I can't afford to have a reading activity take an entire period. I can't do that. I don't have the time for that.

It is curious that Shane expressed such a concern for time. In stating that he "can't afford to have a reading activity take an entire period," he suggested that having enough time to cover the content of his French 11 course was the source of his concern. Time was a recurring theme for Shane throughout the inquiry. I was worried that it would be difficult to convince Shane that effective strategies could be another way for students to learn, and therefore, he might be reluctant to try these strategies if they took too much class time to teach.

After he taught his students to use the *KWL* strategy, Shane was far more optimistic that his students could now effectively demonstrate their learning in a short written summary or personal response. Shane selected a French article on the Tour De France; however, to his surprise, not all of the students knew what the Tour de France was. Knowing that students must have "some basic knowledge if they are going to ask a question," Shane began the activity by providing some basic information about the Tour de France and then encouraged students to add to the conversation with what they knew about cycling and endurance racing. Next, Shane spent some time explaining to the students what *wonder questions* might look like before he asked them to make questions of their own. He told the Literacy Inquiry Team that he wanted students to make thoughtful pre-reading questions "about the kinds of things they would want to find out." Finally, after students were finished reading, they were asked to put away the reading and write a summary of the article as well as a response about whether or not their wonder questions were answered.

In addition to providing firm guidelines for the summary and response and asking students to put away the article to avoid the tendency for students to translate, Shane

found it was helpful if he put a strict five-minute time limit on writing. He concluded that this forced "an economy of words." I asked Shane if having such a short time limit would have a negative impact on the quality of some of the writing. (In retrospect, this was an important leadership action, simply because I can see that I was gaining the confidence to challenge my colleagues to articulate their observations). Shane's response was that this activity was more about demonstrating comprehension than writing, and that in fact, if they wanted to, students could "answer in point form, and not in complete sentences." The intention was also to move students away from translating sentences directly from French to English. The focus was clearly on improving thinking, not writing.

Shane indicated that the *KWL* was a useful activity, especially after he set clear guidelines for his students. He explained that the activity was less time consuming than simply asking students to read an article and then write a summary response:

> This one was a bit more doable. This exercise, from start to finish took about thirty to forty minutes. If a reading activity takes longer than twenty-five minutes, I have to look at it carefully and say, 'OK. What do I have to do to change it and make it work better?' A reading assignment shouldn't take longer than that.

Shane also shared that by using this approach, he felt confident that students could demonstrate that they "understood and learned something" from reading the article. Once again, it is evident that even though Shane's perception of the *KWL* strategy was positive, he still maintained that reading activities should not take longer than twenty-five minutes. As a leader, I might have challenged this statement and asked him where he learned this information or whether he was speaking strictly from his own experience. Again, this was part of my own leadership learning.

Natalie's Perceptions of the *KWL* Strategy

Natalie's perceptions of student writing in her Social Studies 10 class, both before and after teaching the *KWL* strategy, are summarized in Figure 21.

Natalie's perceptions of student writing before teaching the *KWL* strategy:

- Written responses were not very thoughtful.
- Students did not write much because they did not know what to write about.

Natalie's perceptions of student writing after teaching the *KWL* strategy:

- She was pleased with the creativity of her students' written responses.
- Students were beginning to develop their own voice about topics.
- It was time consuming to teach *KWL* but the writing is much more focused as a result of teaching the strategy.

Figure 21. Natalie's perceptions, both before and after teaching the *KWL* strategy.

Like Shane, Natalie also expressed some frustration because many of her students could not write thoughtful responses to the articles they were reading in Social Studies class. Before teaching the *KWL* strategy, she asked her students to read an article on medicine and science, and then to write a response. She explained that this "did not go well." After evaluating the student's work, she noted that her students "tended not to write much at all." She explained that student responses were probably brief "because they didn't know what to write."

Natalie decided to make two key changes to her instruction. First, after students finished reading an article on the technologies of war, she taught the *KWL* strategy. Students made notes on their own before Natalie worked through a brainstorming process with them on the whiteboard. Second, she worked with her students to generate a list of fifteen relevant topics before asking each student to choose a topic of interest to write about. Natalie was very pleased with the creativity of her students' responses:

> And they're all quite different, even the ones that did the same topic. And even though we had gone over things together, they were all very different. I read four

> or five on machine guns and they were all different from each other. A few things were the same but they came to their own conclusions about things.

Natalie shared that working through the *KWL* strategy with the students took a considerable amount of class time. Nevertheless, she explained that when she compared the work her students did on this same assignment last year to the work students did on it this year, it seems that the strategy helped her students to produce writing that is "much more focused":

> I have to say that last year I tried this and this took about a half hour. This time [using *KWL*] it took an entire class, but I think in the end this time it is much better.

Time was a concern for Natalie but she was positive about the effectiveness of the strategy.

Terry's Perceptions of the *KWL* Strategy

Terry's perceptions of student writing in her Combined Studies 10 class, both before and after teaching the *KWL* strategy, are summarized in Figure 22.

Terry's perceptions of student writing before teaching the *KWL* strategy:

- Students could not think of things to write about. Compare and contrast was difficult for students.

Terry's perceptions of student writing after teaching the *KWL* strategy:

- The *KWL* strategy was effective. Her students "got into it" and shared many questions and information that they had learned.
- The *KWL* strategy was quite challenging for her ESL students
- Most of her students engaged in "deeper inferential thinking."
- Most of her students produced better writing.

Figure 22. Terry's perceptions, both before and after teaching the *KWL* strategy.

Terry admitted that her own experience with teaching Social Studies to her Combined Studies 10 students has shown her that, without helping students to access the necessary background content for the lesson, students find it difficult to "draw inferences

and take risks" in their writing. Much like Natalie, she found that her students struggled to find topics to write about. When she asked her students to read two short articles and to write a "compare and contrast," she discovered that "they had nothing."

Although Terry began by teaching *KWL* in a very simple way, by asking students to "do the K and W on their own" and then sharing this information as well as any new information learned with the entire class, she admitted that the strategy was effective. She shared that her students "really got into the wonder part" and that "they all had a lot of questions and...information that they learned."

Once students learned the *KWL* strategy, she used it three other times but adapted it for each activity. The second time she used *KWL* was to engage students in the thinking process before teaching them to write a paragraph:

> Then I did another *KWL*. What does a decent paragraph look like? I wanted to walk them through the structure too. So, what do you know about know about what a paragraph looks like? What do you wonder? And, what have you learned?

Next, Terry was able to take what her students learned about *KWL* from both the reading activity and the paragraph writing activity and "put [them] together" into a single lesson. This time, Terry asked her students to "read a transcription of an imagined conversation between a French settler and an Iroquois" and then "write a compare and contrast based on any five of the ten differences." Terry explained that although most of her students found the assignment to be "useful," it was still challenging for a few of her ESL students, whom Terry speculates may not have had as much experience as the other students in using the *KWL* strategy:

> And it was useful. Now, I have a lot of ESL students who don't find that particularly useful because I don't think they really know how to use that strategy

> yet. I think most of these kids had used a strategy like this before because they fell into it quite easily.

Terry used the *KWL* strategy a fourth time with an article on the explorers and the discovery of the New World. This time, as students shared with the class what they already knew and wanted to know about the discovery of America, Terry wrote the information on the overhead. Next, she had students work on their own to complete a chart of the things they learned from the reading. Terry then asked her students to put their charts away and to use their learning from the article to assist them in doing a creative write on "what it would have been like to leave the ship and come to the New World." Terry was pleased to see her students engage in deeper inferential thinking and also produce better writing after doing this last activity:

> I have just finished editing and looking at their writing and it was great. Lots and lots of detail. They are really competent writers and able to embellish their writing. I found it was great. I got some really outstanding writing. And even the ESL kids who completely struggle with language, they had some really creative ideas. So I could see some really good inferential thinking going on. I would say inference was increased in all the students, and with my really competent writers, they were really able to express that better.

It is interesting to note that although Terry is responsible for teaching a considerable amount of content in her Combined Studies 10 class (she teaches these students both Social Studies 10 and English 10), finding time to make literacy improvements was never an issue. Terry seemed quite comfortable making these changes to her teaching and excited to share these improvements with the rest of the Literacy Inquiry Team. Terry had previous experience with teaching literacy strategies and sharing these strategies with other teachers in her role as the school's Literacy Coach. She went the farthest in terms of experimenting with and adapting the strategy to other learning activities, which suggested to me that experimentation is as essential aspect of teacher

inquiry. As teachers gain experience with literacy strategies, they might find several opportunities to implement and adapt each strategy and perhaps even combine them as needed. I am also confident that over the course of the study, Terry's positive experiences helped alleviate some of the anxieties team members might have been feeling. My perception is that it was helpful to have a member on a Literacy Inquiry Team who has had some experience in making effective changes to how literacy is taught.

Sharon's Perceptions of the *KWL* Strategy

Sharon's perceptions of student writing in her Planning 10 class, both before and after teaching the *KWL* strategy, are summarized in Figure 23.

Sharon's perceptions of student writing before teaching the *KWL* strategy:

- Writing expectations had already been established, so the mechanics of writing was not an issue before Sharon taught the *KWL* strategy.
- Students were copying word for word from their textbook. This was a concern.

Sharon's perceptions of student writing after teaching the *KWL* strategy:

- Students struggle to formulate wonder questions if the subject matter is not relevant and meaningful. There is improvement if the class first works together to create wonder questions.
- There was significant improvement in students' abilities to demonstrate their learning. Students could produce a quality written response without copying directly from the textbook.

Figure 23. Sharon's perceptions, both before and after teaching the *KWL* strategy.

Sharon had her Planning 10 students read an article about the Tenancy Act and then she asked them to write a summary and response. She had been working to improve student writing this semester and she felt as though her students were taking their writing assignments more seriously. The writing she collected this time was "good"; "their paragraphs were really well written" with "clear topic sentences," there was "plenty of information in the body" of the paragraphs, and they wrote "good concluding sentences." Despite these improvements in student writing, Sharon discovered that several students

were copying information word for word as it was presented to them in the original article.

Sharon had an interesting and unique application for the *KWL* strategy. She was hoping that she might be able to use the *KWL* process to help her students to focus more on writing about what they learned from reading and to rely less on copying information directly from the text. She selected an article on aging and life transitions and worked through the *KWL* strategy with her students. She discovered that students knew a lot about the subject but they struggled to formulate questions about things that they would like to know. She guessed that her students might be too young to find the subject relevant and meaningful:

> [we were reading about] what needs to happen when you are getting ready for the end of your life, such as getting your affairs in order. But they really struggled with coming up with things that they want to know. And I don't know if it's just because when you're sixteen years old you're not really looking at getting your affairs in order. It could have just been the subject they were doing.

Sharon found it was helpful to do the wonder part together as this stimulated some class discussion.

After students finished reading the article, she asked them to write some notes on the things that they learned. Next, she asked them to put away their article and to use only their notes and "what they discovered [from doing] the *KWL*" strategy to assist them in writing their summary and response paragraphs. Sharon saw significant improvement in her students' abilities to demonstrate their learning. The writing was still strong, and students demonstrated that they had learned a lot about the subject without feeling the need to plagiarize:

> From looking at their rough copies, they did a much better job. And part of that was that after they did the *KWL*, I actually took back the reading I had given

> them, and I told them to use what they've discovered in the *KWL*. And I found that there was way less plagiarism in their writing. So they did a really good job on the second one doing the *KWL*...There was a ton that they had learned. Like, they had never thought that they should make sure that they should have all their papers together or that someone knows where the key is for your safety deposit box or that you sign papers that say that this person can act on your behalf.

Steve's Perceptions of the *KWL* Strategy

My perceptions of student writing in my grade eight Reading Support Program, both before and after teaching the *KWL* strategy, are summarized in Figure 24.

Steve's perceptions of student writing before teaching the KWL strategy:

- Students were frequently off-task during silent reading and when it was time to write.
- Students wrote very little or copied directly from the article.
- Students did not know how to write a personal response.

Steve's perceptions of student writing after teaching the *KWL* strategy:

- Initially, students found that using a chart ("important details" and "things that I've learned") was challenging. Students were unable to decide what was important in an article.
- The strategy took some time to teach but was worth it.
- Students were more focused during reading and writing activities.
- Writing was improved. Students had interesting things to say and they could demonstrate their learning through their writing.

Figure 24. Steve's perceptions, both before and after teaching the *KWL* strategy.

Like the others on the team, I began by gathering some data about how well my students performed before I taught them to use the *KWL* strategy. This time I focused my study on students in my grade 8 Reading Support Program. We began with a nonfiction article on the introduction of Halloween festivities in Germany. I had my students do the reading on their own and then I asked them to write a summary and response for the article. Some of the students struggled with staying on task with the reading and the writing, and I found myself constantly urging students to get back on task. When I assessed the written responses, I was not surprised that most of them wrote very little at

all and other students wrote lists of facts that they took directly, word for word, from the reading. Even the facts they listed were not necessarily the main ideas or the most significant details in the reading. None of the students provided a personal response to the reading, despite my directions to write a summary and a personal response. I had to explain what a summary was several times during this activity, so I realized that I would have to return to this idea of demonstrating what a summary and a response looks like in another lesson.

Continuing with my Halloween theme, the following day I selected an article on witches. I began teaching the *KWL* strategy by asking the students to make a list of all of the things they knew about witches. Next, on the board I began a *Wonder Web* (Gear, 2008) by writing the word "witches" and drawing a circle around it. One by one, I asked students to come up to the board and to add a point to our web. As we continued to add points to the web, the activity became increasingly collaborative:

> We brainstormed all of the different things we knew about witches and through sharing out, students were encouraged to add to it based on new ideas they had or by jumping off from what other students said.

After we had added everything that we knew about witches to the web, I asked my students to work on their own to think of three questions that they would like to know about witches or three things they hoped to find out from today's reading. We returned to the board to make a list of our wonder questions and we continued to add wonder questions as students thought of new ones.

After students had read the article, I asked them to divide a piece of paper into two columns and to label one column "Important Details" and the other column "Interesting Things I Learned." Students did find filling in the chart to be a challenge,

and I had to explain several times why one detail might be considered more important than another. After students completed their charts as best as they could, I drew a similar chart on the board and asked each student to share his or her findings and to tell the class why he or she thought a detail was important or interesting. I recorded the results on the board.

This was a busy class, and although the activity took the entire period, it was a productive use of class time. Students seemed more interested in the reading and their brainstorming work seemed to indicate that they had learned a great deal from it. We did not have enough time in class to do any writing that day, so instead I decided that I would use the work the students did to write a short summary and response. My idea was to use my writing as a model of what a summary and a personal response looks like.

The following day the students read an article on rats and they worked through the *KWL* strategy on their own. I provided students with copies of Gear's (2008) *Wonder Web* worksheet to help them with constructing their webs and to prompt them to make pre-reading questions. In addition, I asked students to make a two column chart with the headings "Important Details" and "Interesting Things I Learned." As students worked, I recorded some observations in my journal as well as some of the comments students made about the reading. I shared these observations with the others on the Literacy Inquiry Team :

> With this [reading], as opposed to the first reading, it was easier to keep them engaged. This was likely because after completing the K and W parts they now had a purpose for the reading. And I was hearing all sorts of comments from students as they read. They'd come across something interesting in the article and they'd want to talk about it and share it, but we're trying to stay focused on the reading...I could tell... that students were more focused on the reading and more interested in it.

One student asked, "What happens if I only have one really good question, instead of three?" This shows that this student was thinking about the questioning itself as an important part of pre-reading. I also shared a comment another student made, which suggested that he was trying to understand an allusion that was made in the reading and to make a connection between this reading and another story he knew:

> [One student said] "I bet this is about the fiddler." Likely he really meant "the Pied Piper." Nevertheless, he seemed to have caught on to that allusion that was made in the reading and made the connection, which was impressive.

Another student made a personal connection to the reading when she stated, " I swear I've read this before," and then later shared that she "once had a nest with baby rats." Other students were making comments about things of interest in the reading. One student exclaimed, "That's crazy how the other rats dragged that other rat away on its back!" Even though students were not really supposed to be talking, I was quite surprised that, unlike other times when I had to hush chatty students during reading time and urge them to get them back on task, these comments were about the reading itself.

Shane asked me if I thought the success of the activity "had something to do with the topic." I told the team that I thought the activity was just as important as the reading because "students were doing so much of the thinking before reading the article; it had some effect on [the students'] willingness to read it."

I asked students to write a summary response on the rats article so I could see if there was any improvement since they did the first summary response on the Halloween article. The first thing I noticed was that students had much more to say in their writing and that the details they chose to discuss were more pertinent to the main idea of the article. At our meeting, I shared samples of writing from the Halloween article and the

rats article. These samples were written by the same students to show the progress made. I began by sharing two samples of summary responses written by one of my students:

> The first summary response is very short. Also, it isn't even a summary, but more like a collection of disjointed details, with no connection between the points made. The same student, on her final write [after *KWL*] – look how much more she wrote!

I then shared how another student was not only learning how to make a good summary but also making great progress in writing a personal response to the reading:

> She gave a decent summary and she grouped all of her details together in a more logical way than she did in the first write. Also, she gave an opinion, and she said "these are the things that I learned" right in the writing. Again, more of a summary and [personal] response [instead of] just a summary, which is great.

Several students returned to their wonder questions in making their responses. Other students, knowing that I would be asking them to write a summary, made use of a *magnet word* strategy I had taught them in September. I showed the Literacy Inquiry Team the work one student had done highlighting important words and phrases as she was reading.

Sharon commented that this particular student "did not highlight every line." Shane added that when his students were working on their summaries "they highlighted basically everything." I offered that this was a great strategy to teach my students, but even though I was "pleased to see students using the *magnet word* strategy," I was more surprised that I was able to "move a few of the students beyond summarizing the reading and bring in connections and inferences." I suggested that for most of the students, there was a "big improvement" in student responses after teaching the *KWL* strategy.

Student Perceptions of the *KWL Strategy*

I had an opportunity to ask students questions as they were handing in their work. This was part of my triangulated data collection method. I wanted to know what students

thought about the usefulness of the *KWL* strategy. I asked the students, "Does it help to mind map before reading? Does it help to make wonder questions before you read?" One student said "It gets my mind ready. It gives me something to think about." One boy suggested that the strategy is helpful "because if you think about what you already know then it helps you get into it." Other students commented on how the strategy helped them with recalling information. One student commented that he "find[s] books boring, so when [he] thought about it first it helped [him] remember." Another student commented that "it's easier to retell what's happening." Other comments seemed to suggest that the *KWL* strategy helped students to self-monitor their learning by guiding them back to their pre-reading work in order to examine how their thinking changed after the reading. For example, one student stated that "if you predict what's happening you learn more things. Another student said something similar when she told me that "when you make questions you go, OK, I just learned this." She also commented that the activity was helpful because she could "go back and look at the web and say I knew this."

Terry discovered something similar when she asked her Combined Studies 10 students to comment on the effectiveness of the *KWL* strategy:

> They all found that it was helpful, but for the students that were able to access a lot more vocabulary and whatnot, once they were taken through that whole process and they are able to add more detail - because they add[ed] what they knew and wondered in it. They thought that that was pretty useful too.

Natalie shared that her students also found their work with the *KWL* strategy to be effective, especially because the students in her Social Studies 10 class had the opportunity to brainstorm together and share their learning with the entire class:

> My kids asked if we were going to continue to do this every time we do writing. I said maybe not every time. And they said "but it was good though. It was good though because we all got to hear stuff."

Instructional Changes to Improve Literacy: Our Findings and Summary Assertions

Now that we had done some planning and sharing together, I was confident that each of us could move forward to make instructional changes and gather data to answer our unique classroom inquiry questions. We had planned the small study on the *KWL* pre-reading strategy together and set some common expectations about data and informally we had set some norms about how we would share our findings. As a leader I had tried to model the importance of gathering data from multiple sources to validate our findings. I was optimistic that the members of the team would commit to making instructional changes and have useful data and perhaps samples of student work to share with the rest of the Literacy Inquiry team when we met in December.

As a leader, I stayed in contact with the members of the team through informal classroom visits and conversations in the staffroom. I continued to offer my support while *gradually relinquishing responsibility* (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) to the members of the team. I believe that maintaining this balance between guiding and supporting team members while encouraging them to experiment with instructional changes was my most important leadership action during this part of the inquiry process. At the end of the inquiry I would be asking members of the team to speak about the challenges and opportunities and to share their thoughts about whether they will continue to make improvements to literacy instruction in the future; therefore, it was important that the members of the team have the freedom to experiment with instructional changes and come to their own conclusions about the results. I have provided a final updated list of leadership skills that I had developed, as well as skills that I needed to improve on, in Appendix B.

The Literacy Inquiry Team met together for the fifth time on December 9, 2009 to share the improvements each of us had made to literacy instruction over a five week period. This section documents the instructional changes that each member of the team made as well as his or her perceptions of the effectiveness of these changes.

Sharon: Setting Clear Expectations and Shifting to Formative Assessment

When the team met in September to create our priority pie, Sharon suggested that students do not always take their writing assignments seriously when they are not in English Language Arts class. Several weeks ago she had demonstrated journal and paragraph writing for her students in order to model her expectations for writing assignments. Although she saw improvement in student writing, she was curious about whether her students would make further improvements to their writing if her assessment practices were more formative. She wanted to know if students would improve their writing if she set high expectations and provided more feedback and opportunities for improvement. In effect, practice and improvement became part of the expectation for success. A summary of Sharon's findings as well as a summary assertion is displayed in Figure 25.

Sharon began this part of her inquiry by having her students do a simple survey. She asked her students if they believed that writing expectations should be the same in her class as they were in English Language Arts class. She discovered that 76% of her students believed that writing expectations should be lower for elective classes than for English Language Arts class. Most of her students also agreed that they could improve their writing and said that they would do so if the teacher said he or she would not accept written assignments that were not written with care. In other words, students would

improve their written work if Sharon was expecting the same quality of writing that their English Language Arts teachers expect. This was an interesting discovery as many students were admitting that they would put more effort into writing assignments if this was the expectation for the class. Furthermore, students were suggesting that writing expectations in elective classes are not always as rigorous as they might be in English Language Arts classes.

Sharon's Classroom Inquiry

Question #1
What evidence is there that having 'proper' [clear] writing expectations in elective classes will improve written work?

Data Sources
1. Student survey
2. Comparing student work with previous assignments (grade book data)
3. Writing conferences (observational data)

Findings [Sharon's Perceptions of these instructional changes]
1. Students like the formative feedback conferences.
2. Most students don't agree they should have to do proper work in electives.
3. Most students do have better writing skills than they have portrayed.
4. When expectations are present students can work and do better work/writing.

Summary Assertion
If elective teachers set higher expectations [and model these expectations] for student writing, students can and will write better.

Figure 25. Sharon's findings: classroom inquiry on writing expectations.

The most significant instructional change Sharon made was in providing timely feedback to her students about their writing and then inviting them to make improvements. Although formative assessment is not a literacy instructional strategy, Sharon discovered that it is impossible to separate literacy improvement and formative assessment. She was working to create higher expectations for student writing as well as

a culture of constant improvement; showing students how they could improve was a necessary part of this. She started "conferencing with the students while [she was] walking around the classroom" and "calling [students] up to [her] desk if [she was] marking something." Assessment became formative. Instead of providing a summative grade, as she did in September, she gave "verbal and written feedback" on drafts or "point[ed] things out" as students were working on a piece of writing. Sharon had her students examine and evaluate three of the writing assignments they completed in September. She then asked her students to compare the quality of "three recent journals to the three they did at the beginning of September." Sharon described how her students "could see that they had improved," especially after she set clear criteria for writing assignments and provided feedback about where improvements could be made. In this part of her inquiry, Sharon learned that many of her students were capable of producing better written work; some students were simply choosing not to. It seems clear to me that Sharon discovered that students' attitudes are shaped by teacher expectations. She also learned that many of her students would improve their writing if clear expectations were established and students were provided with feedback and opportunities for improvement.

Sharon: Accessing Prior Knowledge

Sharon's third instructional change was to help her Family Studies 12 students to access prior knowledge and to encourage them to demonstrate inferential thinking in their writing. Her findings and summary assertions are displayed in Figure 26.

In order to establish a baseline for her study, she asked her students to do a short

write on pregnancy. After assessing the writing, her perception was that students had difficulty writing about the topic:

> I asked them to write down anything and everything that you can tell me about pregnancy – how it occurs, what happens during pregnancy – anything you can think of, write it down. And what I ended up getting in was a whole lot of, oh my God! Kids have no clue!

She commented that, in addition to students knowing very little about the topic, the writing was also very weak, and there were problems with "topic sentence[s] not match[ing] what was in the body," there were "no concluding sentence[s]" and there were "no transitions."

Sharon's Classroom Inquiry
Question #2
What evidence is there that discussing prior knowledge of a subject encourages students to make inferences in their writing?

Data sources collected
1. Student Survey
2. Evidence of improvement when comparing recent assignments with previous assignments (observational data)
3. Evidence of inferential thinking in student writing (grade book and observational data)

Findings [Sharon's perceptions of these changes]
1. Prior knowledge discussions trigger memories for students.
2. Prior knowledge allows students to better understand what they are learning and acts as a transition to new material.
3. Many students say they like to discuss for prior knowledge before starting a new assignment.
4. Students do not like taking the time to compare new and old assignments.

Summary Assertion
Prior knowledge acts as a memory invoker, which allows students to make inferences in their writing.

Figure 26. Sharon's findings: classroom inquiry on discussing prior knowledge.

Sharon was concerned that her students could not demonstrate inferential thinking in their writing. She explained that, because she was "trying to give students

formative assessment about their writing," that this activity was a "big waste of time" because students "did not have much to say." Thinking back to our earlier work with the *KWL* strategy, I was not surprised by her observations. We had already discovered that when topics are not particularly relevant to students, it is difficult for students to find much to say. In retrospect, I should have asked if her students knew what an inference was and whether she explained this term to students before gathering the baseline data. I see this as a missed leadership opportunity.

Before giving another writing assignment, she decided to hold a discussion with the class in an effort to build some background knowledge about the topic. She decided to revisit the topic of pregnancy. She introduced some information that she believed students did not know, based on the results from the writing assignment, including "details about ovulation" and the "twenty eight day cycle." She noticed that the discussion was helpful in generating some meaningful discussion:

> Once we started discussing that then they started to remember. "Ok. Yeah, I do know this stuff. I do understand." And they were able to at least discuss what it is that they know about pregnancy.

Later, she asked her Family Studies 12 students a simple survey type question: "Does discussing a subject help to invoke memories for you, and is this helpful in generating different ideas that you can include in your writing?" Eighty percent of her students agreed that discussion was helpful for students in accessing background knowledge. Twenty percent of her students stated that discussions were not particularly useful. Nevertheless, Sharon's perception of this instructional change was that student writing was much improved after class discussions. Most students were able to demonstrate inferential thinking once Sharon began to "draw attention to the inferences

they were making" and explain "why [these inferences] were great." Inferential thinking was encouraged in student writing with plenty of "written and verbal positive feedback" as well as "some good phone calls home when kids handed in assignments that were done really well." I speculate that there are two reasons that Sharon was able to increase her students' inferential thinking: it is possible that her students were not familiar with what an inference was, and so in "drawing attention" to this type of thinking, she was able to teach this new term to her students; secondly, by having a class discussion before introducing the writing assignment, students now had enough background knowledge to assist them in thinking deeply and inferentially about the topic.

Sharon had decided to teach a novel study on *The Pigman* (Zindel, 1968) in her Family Studies 12 class as a way to supplement her lessons on "the transitions from adolescence into adulthood." Often she asked her students to write journal responses; however, she was not satisfied with the quality of the written work:

> We hadn't really talked about journal writing and what the expectations were and they were just handing in a lot of stuff that really wasn't that great.

Now that she felt that her students were capable of demonstrating inferential thinking in their writing, and now that she had spent some time teaching and modeling her expectations for journal writing, she asked her students to make some changes to improve some of their journal responses written in September. She shared with the Literacy Inquiry Team her perceptions of why this instructional change was "effective." Her students were able to go back and make the necessary corrections to the writing, and in addition to this, they were able to go back and deepen the thought process by "add[ing] at least two inferences" to each of their journal entries about the novel. I was excited to listen to Sharon share this instructional improvement with the team. Although initially I

was somewhat surprised that Sharon was choosing to focus on writing instead of reading, I decided that this part of her inquiry was not just about improving writing after all; it was also about deepening thinking.

Sharon: Improving Writing with Peer Editing and Multiple Drafts

Sharon's third research question was related to her other two questions. She was interested in knowing if she could encourage students to improve their writing if she asked them to peer edit their work and write "multiple drafts of the same assignment." Her findings and summary assertions are presented in Figure 27.

Sharon's Classroom Inquiry
Question #3:
What evidence is there that peer editing and multiple drafts of the same assignment will improve writing?

Data sources collected

1. Student Survey
2. Comparison of written work between drafts (grade book data and observational data)
3. Peer assessment of each draft (observational data and anecdotal data)

Findings [Sharon's perceptions of these changes]
1. Students agree that peer editing is valuable.
2. Students hate taking the time to peer edit.
3. There seems to be improvement in the second drafts with all students (most students were scoring between 4 and 6, on a 6 point scale).

Summary Assertion
Students can learn to assess their work and the work of their peers and greatly improve the quality of their written work.

Figure 27. Sharon's findings: classroom inquiry on writing improvement.

Before submitting each new draft for her to assess, students were given time to work together to "peer edit" each other's writing. She shared that students "hated peer editing," but they agreed that it was "valuable" because they could see improvement in their writing by the second draft. She was also confident that students had a better

understanding of writing expectations and that they could do a better job of editing their own written work after going through several stages of editing their work and the work of their peers.

Natalie: Helping Students to Organize Their Thinking

After the Literacy Inquiry Team worked with *KWL* and *KWI* strategies, Natalie decided that her first research question would be about helping students to organize their thinking. An extension of her earlier work, she wanted to know if "working through a *KWI* chart [would] help [her Social Studies 10 students] with their understanding of events." She also wanted to know if these new understandings would "be translated into their writing." Like Sharon, Natalie also made the observation that her students needed a more formal plan for organizing their thinking before writing. In this phase of her research she made two instructional changes: first she incorporating a chart to help students to organize their thinking; next, she introduced her students to a strategy called *SEA* (Statement, Explanation, Analysis) to help them to transcribe their thoughts into clear paragraphs. The results of these instructional changes are summarized in Figure 28.

After spending a considerable amount of time reading with her students in the textbook, giving notes, and discussing the topic, she asked her students to write a short paragraph. After assessing the writing, she explained that she was not impressed with the results:

> It was not good. The marks are between one and four or four and a half [on a six-point scale]...Overall, they were all over the place. They were confused. They brought in things that had nothing to do with the topic.

Natalie's Classroom Inquiry
Question #1:
What effect will the use of a *KWL* chart have on students' understanding of events? Will this translate into their writing?

Data sources collected

1. Observational data (during class activities)
2. Grade book data (assessment of written work)

Findings [Natalie's perceptions of these changes]

1. Before teaching the strategy, I found student paragraphs to be unfocused and students ignored important information or didn't write on topic.

2. Although not all students actively participated in all parts of *KWI*, everyone took down information. There was more focus on the topic.

3. On the written response [after teaching the strategy], all of the students received marks between 3-6. Students felt that even when the question itself was more difficult and pointed, they better understood the topic after discussing it (versus just reading the information from the textbook and responding to it).

4. Students were beginning to use the strategy on their own.

5. Essay writing was beginning to improve.

Summary Assertion
KWI helped students to focus their thinking and *SEA* helped students to write clearly.

Figure 28. Natalie's findings: classroom inquiry on writing improvement.

The next day, Natalie decided to work with her students to make a *KWI* chart on the whiteboard. Her students had been through the *KWL* process before and Natalie had seen an improvement in the thoughtfulness of their writing. This time, however, Natalie was asking her students to move beyond summarizing basic facts that they learned and to make inferences instead. The chart she used, adapted from Gear's (2008) *Nonfiction Reading Power,* is included in Figure 29.

The text says...	Questions I have (things I wonder...)	Inferences

Figure 29. Natalie's *KWI* chart.

In addition to using the *KWI* chart, she taught her students to use a writing model called *SEA* (Statement, Explain, and Analysis). The model is quite simple. Before writing a paragraph response, students are first asked to create a three column chart with the headings Statement, Explanation, and Analysis. A statement is simply a simple, concise answer to a question. An explanation asks students to elaborate on their statement by providing details from the text. Finally, in making an analysis, students are encouraged to share a deeper understanding of the topic by putting the facts together and making a new connection or inference. Analysis helps students to answer the question, "So what? Why is this significant?" After students make an *SEA* chart, they write a paragraph. The objective of the *SEA* model is to help students to think deeply and to organize their thoughts before they begin to write. To help explain the *SEA* model, I have created the chart in Figure 30.

After using the *KWI* strategy and the *SEA* model together for several weeks, Natalie's perception of the impact of these instructional changes was positive. She explained that she could see improvement in both the quality and the thoughtfulness of student writing in her Social Studies 10 class:

> They were focused. They realized that when they said something, they had to explain it and try to give me some sort of reasoning for it... And it was way better. Nobody failed, so they all got above three and the highest mark was six, and I think three kids got that.

The NHL has changed the rules since the player strike. What effect has this had on the game?

Statement	Explain	Analysis
The new rules had a negative impact on hockey.	There are far fewer goals scored.	People may begin to lose interest in watching hockey. Furthermore, advertising dollars may also be on the decline.
	The game has become less physical.	Ultimate fighting is far more popular in the US than hockey. People like violent sports (so why all the penalties and fines for fighting in hockey?)
	Salary caps have made it difficult for some teams to attract the best players.	Canadian teams may struggle to stay viable.

Figure 30. Example of the SEA chart – hypothetical question about hockey.

Natalie was not as concerned as Shane was about the time it took to teach comprehension strategies. She admitted that she was now "a little behind" in teaching the course content, but she agreed that it was "worthwhile." After students learned to use the two strategies, they did not need as much teacher guidance with writing activities. They were beginning to use the strategies on their own:

> And also, when we're doing quick writing, I've noticed that some of the students are now taking the time to use the bottom of the page to work out stuff before they write. So they're actually thinking about that.

I could see that both Natalie and Sharon had made an interesting shift from focusing on teaching content to teaching a learning process. It was also interesting that Natalie's students were starting to embrace this process and make these new strategies an important part of their own learning.

After several weeks of practice, Natalie could see improvement in the thoughtfulness and quality of the writing in her students' essays. She stated that the

"rough drafts [were not] stupendous by any means," but essay writing is "way better than [it was] a couple of months ago." This suggests that her instructional improvements had a positive effect on both thinking and writing.

Natalie: Teaching Students to Summarize and Synthesize Information

Natalie's second classroom inquiry question was about the effectiveness of using posters as a strategy for helping her Social Studies 10 students to summarize and synthesize information. She wanted to know if she could find evidence that "breaking down information into a poster format...encourages[s] students to find and learn key information better than traditional sources of information, such as notes or questions." Natalie's findings and summary assertion are displayed in Figure 31.

Natalie's Classroom Inquiry
Question #2:
How might breaking down information into a poster format encourage students to find and learn key information?
Data sources collected

1. Observation data as students read to each other and take notes.
2. Grade book data (posters)
3. Grade book data (quizzes)
4. Anecdotal data (student responses to the activity).

Findings [Natalie's perceptions of these changes]

1. Most students could recall the information after having discussed them in their pairs.
2. Most students felt that the poster had created a link in their mind – (ex. by remembering the train they had drawn on the poster, they knew the railway was one of the points).
3. The students also felt that the one picture they didn't have a clear idea of how to draw was also the concept they understood the least (political deadlock).

Summary Assertion
Students used the picture that they linked to each point as a memory trigger when they were trying to recall the information for the post quiz and test. Students also felt that they taught each other the important parts of each point as they discussed what they were going to include or leave out as they created their posters.

Figure 31. Natalie's findings: classroom inquiry on using posters.

After giving her Social Studies 10 students notes, Natalie decided to gather some baseline data by giving her students a quiz. She was curious about how much information her students could recall after she wrote down notes on the overhead projector and her students simply copied them down in their notebooks. The average mark on the quiz "was 62%." Natalie's explanation was that her students "didn't absorb much from the notes the day before." It was clear to me that Natalie was trying to demonstrate that traditional methods of teaching, in which teachers simply ask students to take down notes, might not be the most effective way for students to learn content in Social Studies 10.

Natalie was beginning a unit on Confederation and she decided that this was a good time to have her students begin the poster activity. She asked her students to work in partners to create a visual-verbal representation to explain "the six events that led to Confederation." She began by instructing her students to use their textbooks to "take notes" but to "write them in their own words." Students were responsible for sifting through the information in the textbook to decide what was most important and to report that information in a way that was brief enough to fit on a poster. Next, she asked her students to find images, either online or in the text, and to print or copy them, and then paste them on their posters to help support and represent their findings.

Natalie shared with the Literacy Inquiry Team that her students did "an incredible job" with the poster assignment. She graded them and displayed them on her classroom walls so students could share their work with their peers. A few days later, she covered up the posters and gave her students a quiz on the "six events that led to Confederation." She was very pleased with how well her students performed. She said that "after the

poster, they did wonderfully." The average mark on this quiz 78%. Her perception was that this activity helped her students to remember because they made deep "visual connections" to the information in the text. I suspect that her students also did well because they had to evaluate and choose relevant information from the text and display it in concise way on the poster. Either way, I agreed that this was an effective method to summarize and synthesize content.

Natalie admitted that she is "not really a poster kind of person" but that her students' success with this activity has convinced her that "maybe [she] should do it more often." Her students said something similar:

> And they actually asked today if they could do another poster for chapter four before the test. So they quite like that.

I asked Natalie why she thought her students liked the poster activity. Natalie stated that her students were "encouraged by the usefulness of the activity" because it helped them to learn and remember information in Social Studies.

I suggested to the team that posters are "great for helping students who tend to be wordy in their writing" because "the limited space of a poster forces students to be selective in the things that they choose." I added that posters "can be a great way to synthesize information." Natalie added that the activity also helped them to improve their note taking. She suggested that this part of the activity was helpful in teaching her students to summarize:

> And I told the students, in your partners, you should have one person read out the notes and the other person summarize it. So they're telling you back what you just read, versus you reading it and trying to write it out. And they did pretty well with that. There were some groups that really struggled, but for the most part that was a good way to do it because they were not looking right at the words and going, "well, if I just change this word, that's the same as summarizing." Well, it's not the same as summarizing.

Terry: Pre-reading Strategies, Inferences, and Main Ideas

Like Natalie, Terry was also interested in continuing her research on pre-reading strategies to improve student reading comprehension and writing in her Combined Studies 10 class. For her first classroom inquiry question, she wanted to know "what effect before reading strategies have on student comprehension on nonfiction texts." Terry's findings and summary assertion are presented in Figure 32.

Terry's Classroom Inquiry
Question #1
What effect do before reading strategies have on student comprehension on nonfiction texts?

Data sources collected

1. Grade book (written responses, chapter questions, quiz)
2. Observational (webbing, *KWL*, graphic organizers, discussions, observations during reading)
3. Anecdotal (student thoughts on using the strategy)

Findings [Terry's Perceptions of these instructional changes]

1. At first, students found it difficult to get into the *KWL* activity. It required quite a bit of modeling to help their understanding, but in the end they found it useful because it helped them to recognize not only what they knew, but more importantly, what questions they wanted to ask during the reading on this topic.

2. After *KWL*, students could demonstrate their learning when they completed the expository paragraph on the topic.

3. Highlighting strategies are useful for helping students to find main ideas and supporting details. Graphic organizers are useful for helping students to organize information and classify information.

Summary Assertion
Pre-reading strategies and note taking strategies can help increase reading comprehension of nonfiction text. If the task is broken down into recognizable parts, students are able to take meaning from the nonfiction piece.

Figure 32. Terry's findings: inquiry on pre-reading strategies and note taking strategies.

Terry was about to start a novel study of *The Glass Castle* (Walls, 2005) and decided to begin the unit by building student interest and helping her students to access prior knowledge about the topic of homelessness. She worked with her students on a webbing activity and then she asked her students to read a short nonfiction article titled "On Being Creatively Homeless" (Stephens, 1995). Her perception was that the article was "useful" because it helped her students to begin thinking about the theme of the novel before reading the first chapter. The article helped to stimulate class discussion, which she followed up with a paragraph writing activity about what it might be like to be homeless.

It is clear that Terry felt that this instructional change helped to increase reading comprehension. She explained that it was important to work with her students to access prior knowledge, follow up with plenty of discussion, and to supplement longer and more difficult nonfiction texts with short, highly accessible reads. She explained that her Combined Studies 10 students struggled with reading nonfiction texts:

> They don't like it very much. And often they assume that they know absolutely nothing about something; however, I find that if we do these things before we start to actually read the text that it makes a difference in their comprehension. And if they can write down what they already know about something then it keeps them engaged as they are reading the passage too.

In addition to webbing, she used a chart similar to the one in Figure 30, except instead of using the final column for students to record inferences, she simply asked her students to record what they learned from the reading. Her perception was that this strategy helped her students to "stay engaged" when they were reading. As a result, student "writing was improved."

Terry also taught her students to use highlighter pens "to indicate main ideas" when reading. She photocopied a nonfiction chapter on the Red River settlement and asked her students to highlight key words and phrases "that they felt supported the main ideas." In addition to this, she created a graphic organizer for her students, with "main idea headings in the outline to help them to organize ideas and classify ideas." When students were finished with this activity, they were asked to use their highlighted articles and their graphic organizers to answer a series of comprehension questions about the reading. Her perception was that students found these three strategies "useful because, when they went back to make more detailed notes and to answer questions, they could see on the page where to find the answer. She also believed that their reading comprehension "was quite good" as "they did very well on the chapter quiz that followed."

Terry: Vocabulary Building Strategies

For her second classroom inquiry question, Terry wanted to know "what effect increased reading and the use of in-context vocabulary building strategies would have on students' written vocabulary." For this part of her research, Terry made three instructional changes: she increased reading volume, she had her students write daily in a response journal, and she used some simple strategies to assist students with building their vocabulary skills. Terry's findings and summary assertion for her second research question are displayed in Figure 33.

Terry decided that every day this semester she would set aside twenty or twenty-five minutes of "free reading" time for students to simply read any book they chose. She took her students to the library to select books. Because Terry also works in the library,

she is familiar with many of the novels that are popular with students. Furthermore, after having her students complete a brief survey in September, she had a better idea of the kinds of books her students would like to read. Terry explained that matching students to interesting and accessible reading materials is key to encouraging them to read more. She also added that she helped her ESL students (English Second Language) to find books that do not have "a lot of teen jargon, which is lost on them."

Terry's Classroom Inquiry
Question #2
What effect will increased reading and using in-context vocabulary building strategies have on student's written vocabulary?

Data sources collected

1. Informal survey of students
2. Grade book data: Writing assignments (Is there evidence that students are using the vocabulary in their writing?) Word banks, vocabulary words and guessed meanings.
3. Observational data of students during activities

Findings [Terry's Perceptions of these instructional changes]

1. It is hard to tell if it is this strategy that is helping develop vocabulary or just the amount they read.
2. I have noticed that they are much more willing to take risks at guessing meaning when they know that it is okay to guess and be wrong.
3. 1/3 of my class are ESL students, and they are still quite reluctant to guess at meanings.
4. Students had little trouble creating rather elaborate meanings for [nonsense] words. They also enjoyed the exercise, and many used other vocabulary words from their readings to replace these meanings.
5. In an informal survey, 100% of the students said that they felt that their vocabulary would continue to increase if they continued to read more.
6. Students are using their word banks (collection of new vocabulary) more in their own writing assignments

Summary Assertion
There is a correlation between student vocabulary and the amount students read.

Figure 33. Terry's findings: classroom inquiry on reading volume and written vocabulary.

Terry selected novels that she felt were both interesting and accessible for her students and then she did a book talk discussion, sharing her views on why each book was a worthwhile read. As a way to celebrate the books that students chose, she created a giant poster to display on the wall of her classroom. Students used the internet to find an image of their book cover and then the image was printed and glued to a poster, along with the student's name. Terry also encouraged her students to discuss books through "informal discussions about their favorite books" and when students completed their novels they created "visual verbal essays."

After daily reading time she asked her students to use one of five prompts to guide them in writing a journal response. She explained the prompts she uses:

> "make a connection to your life (this reminds me of when...), predict an outcome (I think that...), summarize a passage, ask a question (I wonder why...), make an evaluation (I didn't like the part where...)."

With each written response, she had her students include a section for "great words." she asked her students to "select three vocabulary words [from the reading], to write down each word in context" and finally, "to take a guess at the meaning" of each of these words. She shared with the Literacy Inquiry Team her belief that it was important to remove the risk of guessing and perhaps being incorrect when students were learning new vocabulary:

> I give them a mark for it as a reward, whether they're right or wrong in guessing the meaning. And they have found that, and I've kind of surveyed them as I have a very small class, and they said it was very useful just to guess, because even guessing - sometimes they were wrong, but that kind of opened the door to have a discussion.

Her perception was that encouraging her students to use in-context clues and to not rely on a dictionary was especially important. She explained that this was especially true for

her ESL students who often relied on translators to assist them in learning the meaning of English words:

> I find that that is really important, especially for ESL students to understand ambiguity in language and to encourage them to take guesses. And also, culturally, I think [ESL students] are used to more summative assessment, and so they want to look things up instead of taking guesses at words. When you take that off the table, then they are a little more comfortable taking guesses.

Terry's students added their new words to a "word bank" and they were encouraged to use this "collection of new vocabulary words …in their writing assignments."

Although it might seem odd that Terry would suggest that her ESL students learn to not rely on their translators, (it sounds a bit like taking away a person's reading glasses), I believe that Terry is teaching her ESL students that taking risks and making mistakes are part of learning. I appreciate that Terry was inviting her students to take risks and experiment with language because she was trying to lessen the negative emotions that students may feel when they are not successful in their first attempts at learning new words. My feeling was that this method was also much more effective than having students memorize lists of vocabulary words.

Terry did several "in context [vocabulary] exercises." For example, often she "gave them words in context and [had] them guess at meaning." Another exercise encouraged students to experiment with language. She asked her students to take a section of text and rewrite it by changing some of the nouns in the original passage into "nonsense words." Her students were then paired up and asked to try to guess what these nonsense words might mean, using contextual clues found in the passage.

Terry's perception of this instructional change was that her students that read the most were more successful with these in-context vocabulary activities. Students who were "a little more cautious, as well as my ESL students" had "a hard time." Nevertheless, Terry was encouraged that her students were making progress in improving their vocabulary and their writing. She also suggested that after plenty of practice with vocabulary and journal responses she was able to raise her expectations about student writing:

> And I'm finding that their written work, their vocabulary has really improved. But when I take their work in and I see lame vocabulary, I just hand it back and say "no, you can't say 'bad.' You can't say 'big.'" And try to get them to ramp it up a bit.

Terry: Strategies to Improve Expository Writing

For her third classroom inquiry question, Terry asked "how the use of specific writing strategies [might] affect students' expository writing skills." Her findings and summary assertion for her final research question is presented in Figure 34.

Assessment in early September revealed that, in terms of expository writing skills, Terry's Combined Studies 10 students were barely meeting minimal expectations for grade ten students. She commented that student writing "had no focus, weak introductions, no thesis, and little support." "Eighty percent of [her] students" scored a "three on a six point rubric." Terry used the results of this early writing assignment to guide her in selecting three instructional strategies: she developed an expository writing rubric rewritten in "student friendly language," she taught her students to use the *SEA* (Statement, Explain, Analysis) model for paragraph writing, and finally, she taught her students to use a graphic organizer that helps them to outline "specific essay parts."

Terry's Classroom Inquiry
Question #3:
How will the use of specific writing strategies affect students' expository writing skills?

Data sources collected

1. Grade Book data (paragraph writing scores, essay writing scores)
2. Observational data (as students make improvements using the rubric as a guide)
3. Anecdotal data (do students say these strategies are helpful?)

Findings [Terry's Perceptions of these instructional changes]

1. Students have been able to rewrite the rubric into their own words and use the rubric to guide their improvements on expository writing assignments.
2. 100% of my students are now scoring a 4 or better after practice with the rubric.
3. Students commented that they were much more comfortable writing a nonfiction response when they were aware of the criteria.
4. The SEA model has been useful. Students now analyzing what they read.
5. The essay outlining strategy helps because students think about each of the specific parts of an essay and record this on the template.

Summary Assertion
The research suggests that these specific writing strategies are quite effective in improving student writing and marks.

Figure 34. Terry's findings: classroom inquiry on expository writing strategies.

Terry tried to help her students to become "aware of the criteria" for effective writing so that they were "more comfortable writing a nonfiction response." Terry worked with her students to rewrite the 6-point rubric (a rubric developed by the Ministry of Education that teachers at MSS use to assess expository writing) in a more student friendly version. Terry explained that after she used this scale to assess expository writing, her students were able to turn to the criteria they wrote in their student friendly rubrics to interpret the score. Students could also use the rubric to see what improvements

needed to be made in order to achieve a higher score. Terry's assessment was formative, so students were encouraged to use their rubrics to guide them in correcting their writing assignments and then to resubmit their work for further assessment. Terry explained that after some practice with using the rubric, many of her students were able to improve the quality of their written work:

> The results were much better. One hundred percent of my students were able to get a four, and several scored higher on the same six-point scale.

Like Natalie, Terry taught her students to use the SEA (Statement, Explain, and Analysis) model when writing paragraphs. She explained that she found this model "quite useful" because it pushed them to think deeply to provide an analysis of what they read and encouraged them to move beyond summarizing details or simply supporting an answer with a quote:

> And also, building in a Statement, Explain, Analyze piece instead of just Statement, Explain and give a quote, because I don't really find that all that effective really - certainly not for senior kids. You want to start them younger and get them to do a little more analysis. And I've been working on that and finding it quite useful. And I did this with a final *Glass Castle* (Walls, 2005) piece of writing on homelessness.

The SEA model was used to help her students to improve the thoughtfulness of the writing and also provided a model for writing a paragraph.

After Terry's students were comfortable writing a paragraph and after they had internalized the criteria for effective writing using the six-point rubric, she helped her students to plan and write multiparagraph compositions. In addition to spending "a lot of time talking about the difference between an introduction and a thesis statement, and elegant transition and support," she taught them to use a template for outlining essays. Terry's one page template breaks outlining down into the specific parts of an essay.

Students simply have to fill in the boxes and spaces and then use their plan to write their essay. The outline begins by asking students to write a general statement. In a separate box, students write a complete thesis sentence. Next, students are asked to think of three points that can be made about their thesis statement; these points are each recorded in separate boxes. Each point takes the outline down three separate paths, and students are now asked to use the spaces provided to record specifics to support each point. Finally, students are asked to write a concluding statement based on the three points they made.

Terry explained that each of these strategies have helped her students to improve their writing. She added that "in almost every case, their written responses are much more organized and well supported."

Shane: Increasing Comprehension using the *Sort and Predict* Strategy

Shane also wanted to continue exploring the benefits of using pre-reading strategies in his French 11 class. For his first classroom inquiry question, he wanted to know "in what ways will the use of different reading strategies increase student comprehension of reading passages in French 11." He was also wondering how the results of using the *Sort and Predict* strategy would compare to "the old read, and then question and answer in English and [the read and] summarize method." Shane's findings and summary assertions are presented in Figure 35.

In the *Sort and Predict* activity, Shane gave his students a list of French vocabulary words that he selected from a reading passage. Students were asked to analyze the words and their meanings and then to try to sort them in a way that makes the most sense; in the process students created headings for their word groupings. Next, Shane asked his students to make a prediction about what the reading might be about

based on their groupings of French words. Students were then given the original reading passage from which the words were selected and they were instructed to read it to see how accurate they were in their predictions.

Shane's Classroom Inquiry
Question #1: What effect will the use of the *KWL* and *Sort and Predict* strategies have on student comprehension of reading passages in French 11?

Data sources collected

1. Grade book data (quizzes)
2. Survey of students
3. Observational data as students worked through the activity

Findings [Shane's Perceptions of these instructional changes]

1. When doing the *Sort and Predict* method, most students treated it as an attempt to understand language rather than just another assignment. They see comprehension as important - not just the marks.

2. When using the Summarize method in a second language reading situation, the knee-jerk tendency is to translate rather than summarize. Those who do actually summarize do it in such a general way that it demonstrates no actual knowledge of what was read.

3. The students believed that they could better comprehend the reading passages after using the *Sort and Predict* method. (37 out of 42 students felt that *Sort and Predict* left them understanding what they read).

4. The *KWL* method also produced good results in comprehension with students having to work in a structured time period with clear expectations.

Summary Assertion
The *Sort and Predict* and *KWL* strategies increase reading comprehension because they helps students to form a framework before they read.

Figure 35. Shane's findings: classroom inquiry on pre-reading strategies.

Shane explained that his students found the *Sort and Predict* activity to be useful because it helped them to better comprehend the reading passage:

> I asked [my students] a question: "OK, in a global sense, the second time we did the *Sort and Predict*...how many students here feel that they understood

> everything or close to everything that [you] read?" And I had about 98% of the students in both of my classes say that they did, as opposed to the answering questions in English method.

His perception was that the *Sort and Predict* strategy was more effective than simply asking his French 11 students questions in English and then asking them to answer in English. He admitted that when he used the questions and answers in English method, his students had limited comprehension of the reading passage. His students said this method encourages them to "bring out certain pieces of information" but they do not always lead to "understanding the whole thing."

Likewise, asking his French 11 students to read an article and then summarize in English was not useful because it was time consuming and it did not help his students to better comprehend the reading. His perception was that this method was "a waste of time." Shane added that the *Sort and Predict* strategy was a "time saver." He made some changes to how his students use the strategy and he also added a short quiz to test his students' reading comprehension:

> I modified it the second time, essentially taking the "sort" part out as a formal part of the activity. They basically had to do this during the stage where they were using dictionaries and familiarizing themselves with the words anyway. I also added a quantitative quiz at the end, just to gauge comprehension.

Shane: Using Templates to Teach Writing Skills

Shane's second classroom inquiry question was "in what ways will providing students with paragraph templates increase the quality of written assignments in Beginner Spanish 11." After using writing exemplars and rubrics with his English Language Arts classes several years earlier, he decided that he could do something similar with his Spanish class; however, instead of using examples of student writing, he "made up one of

[his] own." He advised his students to use his paragraph as a guide or template for their own writing. He gave clear directions about how his students would be scored:

> This [paragraph] is the minimum of what I expect you to create for me. If you take this paragraph and rewrite it, and just those sentences, and don't add anything to it, you'll get six out of ten. That's the minimum that I require. If you go beyond that and you inject sentences and you put in descriptions and you add things of your own into that and really make it yours, but use that as the skeleton, then your mark will go up.

Shane's findings and summary assertion for his second classroom inquiry question are displayed in Figure 36.

Shane's Classroom Inquiry
Question #2:
What effect will providing paragraph templates have the quality of written assignments in Beginners' Spanish?

Data sources collected

1. Grade book data (scores form the writing assignment)
2. Anecdotal data (asking students is this strategy is effective)
3. Observational data (observing students as they learn the strategy and apply it to their writing)

Findings [Shane's Perceptions of these instructional changes]

1. All students used the template and went beyond its expectations.
2. Many of the students added only one or two sentences [to their paragraphs]; however, the majority added many more.
3. On the template assignment, Out of the 20 students, 11 students received 10 out of 10, and 3 had 9. None of the students had less than 7 out of 10.
4. Students liked having the template to work from.
5. For the second assignment, no template was given. The lowest mark was 6 out of 10. Students were improving.
7. I can see that starting them out with a template helped them to structure [plan and organize] their writing.

Summary Assertion
Using a template gives students a basis from which to work for their first paragraph assignment. Given the fact that the second assignment two weeks later [with no template given] was done so well, seems to suggest that this first, structured, assignment was a success.

Figure 36. Shane's findings: classroom inquiry on paragraph writing templates.

After his students learned to use the paragraph template, Shane assigned a paragraph write, which he scored out of ten marks. His students performed well on this assignment:

> I didn't have one kid get six. I had some get seven, and the majority, which was about eleven of my students, scored nine or ten.

Shane added that after practicing with the template, his students no longer needed to have it in front of them when they were writing. Students could use the "structures that [they had] learned" from the template and with only some basic clarification about the use of "linking words, such as also, either, and but, but in Spanish," his students were able to produce a paragraph that Shane described as "really good":

> I did one a week and a bit ago where there was no template and just gave them an English topic. We were talking about health and food, and I said 'write about the type of food you eat and how often.' And I didn't give them much other instruction except for that...They were incorporating other things. They were wanting to know how to say stuff.

Shane's perception of this strategy was positive. He explained that using the template "at the beginning" was useful because it "showed them how to put together a paragraph." He also thought that his students were encouraged by their success with the assignment:

> [The template] shows them, 'yeah, we can do this. These are all sentences we know how to do. And these are the expectations." So the second time around with the template, at least they had that background, something to start from.

Likewise, Shane was also encouraged by the success of his students:

> I kept it simple so that even the kid who [was] struggling could identify with it. But I'll tell you, the kid who was struggling, he didn't do the template assignment at the beginning, but the second one he did. And he got eight out of ten. I was quite proud of him.

Steve: Implementing a Reading Program

For my first classroom inquiry question, I wanted to explore "the relationship between student enjoyment of reading nonfiction and the amount of time they are given in class for silent reading." Perhaps the most important changes I made to how I teach literacy were simply increasing the volume of reading, providing class time for reading, and giving my students the freedom to choose some of their reading materials. My findings and summary assertion are displayed in Figure 37.

Steve's Classroom Inquiry
Question #1: What is the relationship between student enjoyment of reading nonfiction and the amount of time they are given in class for silent reading?

Data sources collected
1. Survey data
2. Observational data (are students finding books that they can and want to read? Are they using their reading time effectively?)
3. Anecdotal data (comments made by students)

Findings [Steve's Perceptions of these instructional changes]
1. Most grade 11s and 12s said they enjoyed having a choice of reading materials, as well as class time for reading. Students were asking for more time to read in class.
2. Many students read their nonfiction books at home too (many students did four responses after only the first week of reading).
3. Many grade eleven and twelve students said they would choose nonfiction titles in addition to reading fiction; nevertheless, some students feel that nonfiction is "boring" and they will not choose to read it.
5. Matching kids to books took time, even when there was choice. Students need time to "try books on for fit."
6. The grade eights did not do well with reading nonfiction books from the library, even with plenty of choice. They chose books that were not a good fit.
7. Overall, students use class time to read silently, but this was more problematic with the grade eights.

Summary Assertion
Students will benefit from having more class time for silent reading. Nevertheless, taking time to teach students how to assess books is important.

Figure 37. Steve's findings: classroom inquiry on reading enjoyment.

I set aside twenty minutes in my English Language Arts 11 and English Language Arts 12 classes for silent reading and up to a half hour for the grade eights in my Reading Support Program. For the first half of the semester, students chose fictional reads and when students completed their novels they did a brief book share for the class, accompanied by a slideshow presentation. In an effort to encourage students to do more nonfiction reading, we used our silent reading time in the second half of the semester for reading nonfiction titles. Once again, students were free to choose their own books. Not all of my students were excited about reading nonfiction books and I was nervous that my students would not be as engaged with their books as they were when they were reading fictional titles. I explained that I wanted my students to "select books that were a good fit, meaning books that were both interesting and accessible.

I took my classes to the library to browse the titles in the nonfiction section. I encouraged my students to select books that were about topics that were interesting, and promised that they could return a book and find a new one if they selected a book that was not going to be worth their time reading. I explained that I often "try books on," and that I sometimes find myself selecting something else to read if I am not completely interested in a book. I helped students find books, and I asked students to share with me their reasons for choosing a particular book.

After our first day of silent reading, several of my grade 11 and 12 students returned to the library to select different books. I was pleased to see that students were able to gauge how interesting and accessible their books were and that they were willing to take the initiative to return to the library to find a book that was a better fit if they were not happy with their first selections. My grades eights, however, were not as responsible.

They had a difficult time selecting books in the library and their choices had less to do with interest than how many pages they would have to read if they chose it. During silent reading time, many were off task and not particularly interested in reading. On closer observation, it was obvious that most of my students chose books that were too difficult for them to read without causing them considerable frustration. When I questioned them about their choices, I was surprised to learn that many of them chose books that were written about topics that were not of interest for them. One student chose a book about phobias that was written at a very advanced level, likely too advanced for most grade twelve students. Despite not choosing books that were a good fit, my grade eight students did not ask to return to the library to choose another book. I shared my frustration with the Literacy Inquiry Team:

> The silent reading time is not being well used at all [by my grade eight students], and I know why the time is not being used. It is because students cannot get into the book. And why did you pick this book? Why didn't you pick another book? And I would have to force them to go back down and select another book. But the grade elevens and twelves were responsible enough to say, 'hey this isn't for me' and [he or she would] go and get another book. I think that learning how to pick books is important.

At the beginning of the semester I gathered some information about my students' reading preferences. I was not surprised that most of my students, in grade eight, eleven, and twelve, said that they do not enjoy reading nonfiction as much as fiction. At the end of the nonfiction unit I surveyed my students again; this time I asked them specific questions about their attitudes toward nonfiction reading. I have displayed these questions in Figure 38.

Most of my grade eleven and twelve students said that the nonfiction reading time was a positive experience. I received many positive comments, including "I learned quite

a bit" and "it was better than I expected," "I like reading nonfiction when it is about controversial topics," and "it's pretty interesting." Other students said that they did not enjoy reading nonfiction. Some of these comments were "I only like it if it's biographies because they're more interesting," and "it really does not interest me," and "I still dislike nonfiction, unless it is about music." I was not surprised that almost all of my grade eleven and twelve students said that they enjoyed the book that they read; I noticed that many students were taking their books home to read and managed to stay several chapters ahead on their journal writes. Likewise, I was encouraged by the responses I read about having class time for silent reading. One student said that "the reading time helps me [to] unwind after lunch." Another student said that "I don't have time to read at home anymore, so reading in class is good." Another student even suggested that "we should just read for the whole class."

1. Has your opinion about reading nonfiction changed since September? Do you enjoy it or not? Explain.
2. Did you enjoy the nonfiction book you chose to read for English class? Explain why or why not.
3. Given the choice between fiction and nonfiction reading, what would you say you prefer to read? Would you choose to read a nonfiction book?
4. Did you enjoy having class time for reading your nonfiction book? Did having this time add to your enjoyment (or change your opinion) of reading nonfiction books? Explain.

Figure 38. Survey questions about attitudes toward nonfiction reading.

Although the experience was positive, most of my students admitted that they still prefer reading books that are fictional. Nevertheless, many students suggested that they would continue to read nonfiction books as well. A few of the comments I read were "I

will continue to read nonfiction in addition to fiction, as long as they are written well and interest me," I will choose nonfiction books if I need information, but otherwise I'm sticking with fiction," and "I will continue to choose nonfiction books sometimes, but I will still read fiction books too." Not all of the comments were positive, however; one student said "nonfiction sucks" and another said "Will I choose to read nonfiction? Oh, hell no!" One of my grade eleven students wrote a comment that suggests that having a choice in reading materials as well as an interest in the subject of the book are both important:

> My thoughts about nonfiction are kind of mixed. If I get to choose the book and I'm interested in the subject, then I will actually read and enjoy the book. If I don't get to pick, then I probably won't enjoy the reading.

At first, the nonfiction reading unit was not as successful with the grade eights. They were receiving remedial assistance because they were not strong readers, so finding reading materials that were accessible was important. Unfortunately, the nonfiction books in the school library were too difficult for my students to read, and so after wasting a few days trying to urge my students to read the books they chose, I decided to return their books to library. Instead, I photocopied a selection of short, high interest nonfiction articles that we would work on together. I did not survey my grade eight students to ask them about their choice of reading materials and their thoughts about nonfiction reading. Instead, I continued to work with them to try to deepen their understanding and improve their written responses to nonfiction, including this data with my second classroom inquiry question.

Steve: Nonfiction Reading Comprehension Strategies

My second classroom inquiry question was also about nonfiction. I asked "what effect will students' use of reading comprehension strategies have on helping students to deepen their understanding and responses?" My English Language Arts 11 and 12 students and the grade eight students in my Reading Support Program were part of this inquiry. My findings and summary assertion are presented in Figure 39.

Steve's Classroom Inquiry
Question #2:
What effect will comprehension strategies have on helping students to deepen their understanding and responses?

Data sources collected
1. Survey data
2. Grade book data
3. Observational data

Findings [Steve's Perceptions of these instructional changes]
1. For most grade eleven and twelve students, there was a deeper response to nonfiction after we practiced the strategy.
2. Most grade eleven and twelve students can write a summary and write a thoughtful personal response.
3. At first, some grade eleven and twelve students were not able to write focused pre-reading questions. They have improved with practice.
4. After some modeling, students could better "show me their thinking" as they read.
5. Most grade eleven and twelve students said that the strategy is effective in helping them remember and decide what is most important in a passage.
6. Several grade eleven and twelve students said the strategy was distracting.
7. One of my ESL (English Second Language) students said it was helpful for keeping her mind focused on the reading.
8. The *magnet word* and marking text strategies were effective.

Summary Assertion
With practice, using comprehension strategies for nonfiction reading can help students to deepen responses and facilitate recall of information.

Figure 39. Steve's findings: classroom inquiry on nonfiction reading strategies.

I began by doing a *magnet word* strategy. While they were reading a passage, I asked students to select key words from each paragraph and make a list. I then asked students to work in groups of three to compare their magnet words and then to make a new list of words they had in common. Last, I asked students to select five words from the list that are the most important; these are words that that are central to their understanding of the passage. I then invited students to share their words and to explain to the class why they chose each word on their list.

After students practiced the *magnet word* strategy, I began working with them to teach them how to mark text using a highlighter to indicate main ideas and key words. I photocopied many of the nonfiction reading passages onto legal sized paper so that students had room to write questions or thoughts that they had about the reading in the margins. I shared with the Literacy Inquiry Team that, although "I thought [that] this was effective, I wanted to adapt the strategy...so that students could show their thinking without highlighting." I thought that this would be more useful as teachers do not always photocopy the readings from textbooks.

I developed a new strategy by combining parts of the *KWL* strategy and Tovani's (2004) *Double-Entry Diary* strategy (p. 85). I made a template and photocopied it for my students so they could learn to write on this instead of writing or highlighting in their textbooks or library books. There were five sections in this template. In section one, students created pre-reading questions. In section two, students were asked to show me their thinking as they were reading. After reading, students completed sections three and four. In section three, students wrote a summary of the reading, and in section four, students wrote a personal response.

Before students read a nonfiction passage or a chapter in their nonfiction books, they were asked to create three thoughtful questions, which were recorded in a space at the beginning of the template. The intention was simply to make reading more active by helping students to "keep their minds on their reading." I explained to the Literacy Inquiry Team that when we began to use the template, "a few of the students did not make thoughtful pre-reading questions." Questions were sometimes too broad. For example, one student asked, "I wonder what this chapter is about." Other questions were too simplistic and closed ended. For example, a student asked, "Who are the characters in the chapter?" After some explanation and practice, all of my students made more thoughtful wonder questions. One student was reading a chapter from a biography on UFC fighter Chuck Liddell and he asked, "I wonder how difficult it was for Chuck's grandfather to get out of the gang." Other students had thoughtful pre-reading questions about each of the chapters of their books; for example, one student asked, "I wonder where the author stands in respect to creationism and evolution" and "I wonder if the author's beliefs get him into trouble with his profession."

In the second part of the assignment, I asked students to complete a chart titled *Show Me Your Thinking*. This section was divided into three columns. In column one, students indicated the page number of the passage or chapter they were responding to. In column two, which was titled "I Wonder," students could record a question they had while they were reading. The third column was titled "I noticed, I learned"; here, students recorded "things that were interesting or important" about a particular page in the reading.

Initially, my grade eleven and twelve students struggled with this part of the strategy. They "had a hard time knowing the difference between a question and something they found interesting." When I asked my students to explain why this part of the assignment was difficult for them, one student said that she "found it odd that [she] could ask a question." I suggested to the Literacy Inquiry Team that I wanted my students to learn that making questions was an important part of reading:

> I suggested that good readers do that all the time. They have tons of questions. And I told the students that questions are important too and to jot those things down. And they did.

The second time students worked through the strategy they did a much better job of "showing me their thinking." I explained that I wanted my students to practice this because, in my opinion, this was the most useful part of the activity.

I added that this part of the strategy was an effective way for students to mark text and share their thoughts:

> I found that, for the most part, grade eleven and twelve students did a fantastic job with this strategy, in coming up with things they wondered and pointing out things that they learned or found interesting.

When students finished with the reading and they had completed the *Show Me Your Thinking* chart, they were asked to write a summary. Earlier in the semester I had modeled to students how to write a summary, so most students were successful with this. However, after reading their first chapter summaries, I concluded that students needed some further guidance and practice with this part of the strategy:

> Some [of the summaries] were way too short and some were too full of details and things that I don't need to know. I don't need to know every single thing... And students always have questions about how much. How many words? How many lines?

After I set clear criteria and expectations, I was encouraged by my students' progress. On a six-point scale, most of my students were scoring a five or six on this part of the assignment by the time they completed their third chapter.

In the final part of the strategy, students were asked to write a personal response to the chapter. This part of the strategy was problematic. Students had difficulty differentiating a chapter summary from a personal response. At first, there were a few students who continued to summarize or list details from the chapter. Other students wrote very little or skipped this section entirely. When I asked my students why this section was difficult, I was surprised by the responses. I had titled this section "Personal Response: How My Thinking Has Changed," and this title was confusing to a few of the students. One student explained that he read the title and then simply wrote "my thinking hasn't changed." I shared with the Literacy Inquiry Team my response:

> "Well, that's not really what I'm getting at." I said, "You had some questions when you started. After reading the chapter, were your questions answered? Did you have a new understanding? New questions? Did you find something particularly interesting for you?'

I explained to the students that I wanted them to use the three questions they made before they began reading as well as their work in the *Show Me Your Thinking* section to guide them in writing a personal response.

It was my goal to help students to synthesize their thinking and their questions about their reading into a thoughtful written response. I reasoned that my students struggled with writing a personal response and had much more difficulty with this than with writing a chapter summary because they were not accustomed to me asking them to break the very strict rules I had taught them for academic writing:

> And part of the problem is that I do an excellent job of beating the fun out of reading with many assignments by not giving students enough opportunity to respond with "I think" and "I feel." And most of my writing assignments are very academic. I tell them 'I don't want you to use "I" and I just want you to speak directly to the text and provide evidence.' Well, this was an opportunity to provide a [personal] response...and they struggled with that.

Once I offered some further clarification and suggested that they use their notes from the *Show Me Your Thinking* section and their three pre-reading questions, there was considerable improvement in their personal responses. I could definitely see a direct connection between the amount of thought and effort students put into their pre-reading questions and *Show Me Your Thinking* sections and the depth of thought that was demonstrated in the personal response paragraphs. Students who began the activity by making thoughtful questions and then proceeded to record several good questions and interesting thoughts while they were reading had much to say in their personal response paragraphs. On the other hand, students who had little to contribute before and during the reading wrote summaries that demonstrated a superficial understanding of the reading at best. After assessing the personal responses for the third chapter, the class average for both grade eleven and twelve was four on a six-point scale. I concluded that most of my students had met expectations for writing a personal response. A few students wrote responses that exceeding expectations and scored a five or a six.

I surveyed my grade eleven and twelve students to ask them if they thought the strategy helped deepen their understanding as they read. The reaction was mixed. For example, one student said that the *Show Me Your Thinking* part of the strategy was "helpful" because "the notes" assisted him in "remembering the book." Another student said that "by the end of the book [she] will be able to go back through the pages [of her response booklets] and remember the most interesting parts." One of my ESL students,

who struggled with reading in English, suggested that the strategy helped her to "think clearly through each chapter." Another student said that when he has to "write down [his] thoughts [he] pay[s] more attention" to his reading. He added that he is "the kind of person who zones out while reading, and when [he] take[s] notes [he] remember[s] what [he] actually read." Several students also admitted that this strategy might be useful in helping them to understand nonfiction books in other courses. Not all of the students said that the strategy was helpful. Some of the comments students wrote were that the *Show Me Your Thinking* part of the strategy was "annoying" and "distracting" and they did not "like having to stop reading to make notes because [they could not] get into the book."

I did not use this same set of reading comprehension strategies with my grade eights. Instead, I continued to work with these students, encouraging them to mark text with highlighters and to write thoughtful questions. We were reading Aboriginal myths, which I photocopied for my students onto legal size paper so students would have plenty of room to write questions and comments in the margins. Students were already familiar with using this strategy as we had used it several times already for a variety of nonfiction articles.

After the third myth, all of my grade eight students were showing significant improvement in both their abilities to mark text and in the depth of thought they were showing me with their questions and comments. Students were far more selective in the words and phrases they chose to highlight as significant. I shared with the Literacy Inquiry Team that "teaching [my grade eights] to use the magnet word strategy," a strategy we spent several classes working on, "seemed to make a difference." Students no longer had to be asked to mark important words or phrases; they now did this

automatically. Most of my students had also moved beyond "summarizing or retelling events from the myths." Students were writing good questions, and a few students were able to demonstrate inferential thinking and make predictions in the notes they wrote in the margins. For example, while reading in a myth about a place called Rose Split, one student asked "I wonder why it is called that?" In another section of the myth, the author writes about the Raven, who has been coercing and tricking other creatures to come out and play with him. One student responded to this by saying "maybe he is trying to tell them that he will keep them safe from whatever they are afraid of." Another student made a prediction. He said, "I think the raven is going to eat the creatures."

Before teaching students to use reading comprehension strategies, my grade eights had difficulty reading silently for long periods of time; however, encouraging students to mark text and to respond to the reading by writing comments and questions seemed to help keep students on task during the reading. I also noticed that students had much more to contribute to our discussions afterwards. I did not use the *Show Me Your Thinking* strategy with my grade eights. I reasoned that this strategy would have been distracting and perhaps "a bit frustrating for most of them [because they would have had to] stop reading, and then write page numbers, comments and questions on separate sheets of paper. I decided that students were "engaged" when they could simply "mark text and write directly on the pages."

Steve: Nonfiction Texts and Choice

For my final research question, I asked if there was evidence "that exposing students to more nonfiction texts, with plenty of choice and time for reading, will lead

them to become better readers of more difficult texts. My findings and summary assertion are presented in Figure 40.

Steve's Classroom Inquiry
Question #3:
What evidence is there that exposing students to more nonfiction texts (with plenty of choice and time for reading) will lead them to become better readers of more difficult texts?

Data sources collected
1. Survey data
2. Grade book data
3. Observational data

Findings [Steve's Perceptions of these instructional changes]
1. Several grade eleven and twelve students said that reading nonfiction is an important skill that they will need to continue to work on after high school.
2. Many students agreed that learning to mark text would be helpful for writing essays and for remembering information.
3. Some students said they would continue to choose nonfiction titles for pleasure reading.
4. Some students still said that nonfiction books were "boring."
5. Given the choice, students will pick fairly challenging reads if the topic is of interest.
6. When students "try books on for fit" and a book is not a good fit, most students will know when they should try another book that is more accessible.
7. Overall, student responses to fairly difficult texts were quite thoughtful.

Summary Assertion
Students can learn to gauge the "fit" of books. Furthermore, with guidance and practice, students can learn to thoughtfully respond to fairly challenging texts.

Figure 40. Steve's findings: classroom inquiry on nonfiction reading.

Although I cannot conclude that students became better readers, as I did not obtain actual measures of student reading comprehension, I can conclude that students learned reading comprehension strategies, and I am optimistic that students could apply these strategies when reading more difficult nonfiction texts. Among the skills that students learned were text marking skills and deeper questioning skills; several students suggested that both of these skills were helpful for keeping their minds on the reading

and for remembering information. Although not all of the students enjoyed reading nonfiction and some of the students found the comprehension strategy to be distracting, the grade eleven and twelve students agreed that nonfiction reading comprehension skills could be used in other classes.

My perception is that, if given a choice, students will pick books that are accessible and interesting, although some students will choose to read more challenging books if they are interesting. Although my grade eight students did not demonstrate that they would choose accessible reads, I suspect that this was largely due to the fact that our library does not have enough nonfiction reading materials that meet the needs of the students in my Reading Support Program. I suspect that all students, including my grade eights, can learn to gauge "the fit" of nonfiction books. It is clear to me that grade eleven and twelve students could gauge the "fit" of nonfiction books and that, "given the choice, students [will] pick [from] a wide range of reads [including] biographies, historical nonfiction, and books about specific [topics of interest] such as sports and other hobbies."

Responding To Our Umbrella Questions

The Literacy Inquiry Team met together for the sixth time on January 13, 2010 to discuss two umbrella questions. Now that our team had completed four months of professional inquiry, we wanted to know what evidence we had that improved literacy instruction was making a positive impact on student achievement. Our second question was about building further capacity for improved literacy instruction; we wanted to discuss opportunities for sharing our inquiry with other teachers at the school and perhaps encourage these teachers to make improvements to how they teach literacy.

Terry: Perceptions of Student Achievement

In looking back at her efforts this semester and the effect that improved literacy instruction had on student achievement, Terry saw the most significant improvements in writing and vocabulary. She also added that students learned to use various strategies for self-correcting when they were having difficulty comprehending what they were reading.

The results of common reading and writing assessments, which were administered in October and then again in January to all students at MSS taking English Language Arts, Communications 11, and Combined Studies 10, suggested to Terry that her students' writing was improving. She also added that "writing [was] much better" on "class assignments" and that "students themselves seem[ed] to feel that they [were] having more success" with these writing assignments.

Terry managed to increase the reading volume for her students, but without specific instructions about what to think or write about, her students did not analyze their reading with any depth:

> They are reading quite a bit more, but for some, their analysis is still quite superficial. If I leave it open-ended and say, "OK, evaluate or predict, or summarize," but if I'm very specific and I say "this time I'm going to get you to make a connection. You're going to make a connection to this particular part or character you read about" then they can tackle that better. If the instruction is a bit more specific then the results are pretty decent.

Nevertheless, even if the added reading time was not having a measureable affect on the thoughtfulness of student responses, at least not without some extra teacher guidance, she admitted that more reading was "not doing any harm." She shared that more reading was exposing students to more words, and through increased reading and vocabulary building activities, students demonstrated that they had increased their written vocabulary:

> Definitely they are reading more and definitely their vocabulary is better. Definitely they are using better vocabulary in their writing.

In the beginning of the semester Terry asked her students, "What do you do when you don't get it?" She wanted to know what strategies her students knew and could use if they could not comprehend what they were reading. "Most of [her] students" admitted that the only self-correcting strategy they knew was to simply "read [a passage] over again." After several months of teaching her students to write questions, mark text, and use many other comprehension strategies, she was confident that her students were now "pretty good at self-correcting":

> They've got a lot of good strategies. We go straight for the felts. When we start looking at a piece of work, they get that they have to highlight things. The first thing we do is "are there any words here you don't get? Yes? OK. Let's talk about what those are together. OK. Now any questions you have, just write it in the margin of this piece of poetry. No question is a dumb question." So we'll do that and we'll talk about that as a group, and that all takes place before we even talk about what a poem is about. So, they're used to using those strategies.

At the end of semester, Terry invited her students to try and use some of these strategies on their own to help prepare for their final exam. She was encouraged by the progress her students had made in using these strategies. She admitted that her ESL students were still struggling with the poetry section of the exam, but there was improvement.

Natalie: Perceptions of Student Achievement

Natalie also noted that the changes she made to her instruction had a positive effect on student achievement. Like Terry, she observed that her students had improved their writing. Also, she observed her students using some of the strategies she taught, such as note taking and outlining, even when she had not specifically asked her students to do so. Finally, she saw an improvement in her students' abilities to read and gather

large amounts of information and then synthesize and summarize it using graphic organizers and posters.

Shane: Perceptions of Student Achievement

Shane was confident that the instructional improvements he made in both his French 11 and Beginner Spanish 11 classes increased student achievement. He shared with the Literacy Inquiry Team that changes to literacy instruction had "a big impact of what [his French 11] students felt they understood":

> When I used the *Sort and Predict* strategy, which was the strategy I used almost exclusively for the fiction reading... it seemed to have a big impact on what they felt they understood. I asked [students], "do you feel that doing it this way was better in terms of your overall comprehension of the story, over the English answer method?" and pretty much all of them said, "yes it did." And that's just on reading.

Shane stated that his efforts to improve writing with his Beginner Spanish 11 students were also successful:

> Now, in the class that was focusing on writing...they rose to the occasion and they demonstrated that they were able to do it. So that shows me that [the paragraph writing template] method was telling them that this is what I'm expecting you to be able to do, and they were able to do it.

Even though Shane attributed increased student achievement in reading comprehension and writing to the use of three instructional strategies (*KWL*, *Sort and Predict* and the use of paragraph templates), he admitted that students would not use the strategies on their own. Shane suggested that his students needed to be reminded to use the strategies; however, he explained that these reminders have always been necessary to reinforce new learning and expectations with his students:

> When you're basically teaching a brand new linguistic skill almost every second day, things tend to get fuzzy. You see the lights come on when you remind them. With second language instruction you always have to keep reminding them of

> things we've done in the past. You remind them of things we've done before and you build on each particular concept.

Sharon: Perceptions of Student Achievement

Sharon explained that the improvements she made to literacy instruction this semester have helped her students in Family Studies 12 and Planning 11 to write better and to make stronger connections between course content and their lives. Sharon attributed part of her students' success to the higher expectations she set for writing. She also explained that the strategies and resources she used this semester encouraged her students to make deeper connections and more thoughtful inferences in their writing:

> And so we decided to go and do some [internet] research. And that worked a whole lot better than when we first began this and we were looking at the Tenancy Act. So, I think that the strategies that I've been using in the class are working way better. And when you're on the computer, you can't highlight and stuff, so it might be a little bit different than having the paper in front of you, but they did a pretty good job. They went through it pretty accurately. And we did do *The Pigman* (Zindel, 1968) novel too, which was great. We looked at it from the perspective of transitioning from adolescence into adulthood, which is where Family Studies starts. And I think that it's a great novel for depicting that.

Steve: Perceptions of Student Achievement

I explained that I was confident that the instructional changes I made with my English Language Arts 11 and 12 classes and with my grade eight Reading Support Program had a positive effect on students' attitudes toward reading. Most of my students, in all of my classes, agreed that having a choice of reading materials as well as time in class for reading was enjoyable, particularly if the books they chose were fictional. Many of my students still did not enjoy reading nonfiction books, despite having choice and time in class to read; however, for many of my grade eleven and twelve students, there was improvement in student attitudes toward nonfiction reading. Some students stated

that they would consider choosing nonfiction books for pleasure reading in the future. There were several grade eleven and twelve students who did not enjoy the nonfiction reading unit at all, and for a variety of reasons, including a limited number of library resources that are accessible for struggling readers, I failed to implement choice into the nonfiction reading unit with my grade eights.

I was confident that teaching students to use comprehension strategies had a positive effect on student achievement. Pre-reading strategies, such as webbing and pre-reading questions and discussions, encouraged my students to access prior knowledge, and I was encouraged by the thoughtfulness of student work on these activities. I also made the observation that pre-reading activities, as well as strategies students used to monitor and record their thinking while reading, helped my students to stay engaged with the reading. Although some of my students stated that writing thoughts and questions and marking text while reading is "distracting," almost all of my students did a good job of recording thoughtful comments and questions as they made their way through each of the chapters in their nonfiction books. I shared with the Literacy Inquiry Team that "I observed improvements in student writing and summaries were more concise and responses were more thoughtful." I attributed this improvement in student writing to strategies that helped build student engagement before reading and encouraged students to think deeply during reading.

Our Thoughts on Sharing our Work with Other Teachers

Terry suggested that meeting with the school Literacy Team will be a good place to begin "the conversation by sharing some of the strategies that we've used." Sharon

agreed, and then she added two other possibilities for sharing our work with staff members:

> I think that even taking a little bit of time at a staff meeting and just saying 'hey, this is something that we've been working on. These are some of our findings.' Or when you get your Masters done, just keeping a copy on file, because so much of it happened here at the school.

Shane added that we could also consider doing some sharing with teachers "during our professional conversation time" or that we could even consider working with teachers "during professional development" days.

In playing the role of devil's advocate, I asked, "What do you do to build capacity with people who have no interest in teaching literacy? Or can you?" Sharon maintained that teacher leaders are building capacity and through collaborative teacher inquiry projects such as this one, we are working together to invoke positive change:

> Well, I think that your job [leading the Literacy Inquiry Team] is definitely showing that. So is having a literacy coach. I think that a lot of it comes down to our collaborative sense and our collaborative abilities.

I added that not everyone gets involved, but "perhaps we'll never have one hundred percent capacity for literacy." Terry maintained that, nevertheless, it is important that we "celebrate the little victories" and not feel deflated if some people refuse to improve their teaching practices:

> In a school like this, where we have seventy teachers on staff, if we can get together as departments of people who are willing to do that then that's where we go, because there are people who we work with who would say that what they're doing now is working and they are not interested in trying new things.

Terry shared that, in terms of learning communities, with the assistance of our administrator, teachers at our school have built a culture that values and encourages risk taking for the sake of improving learning for both students and teachers:

> Teachers are really famous for being either real risk takers or closing their door. And teacher autonomy is something that no one really wants to mess with. And that's just the nature of the job. I think that we are way better off than a number of schools – I know that there are so many schools that are so fragmented and so all over the map. Everyone in this school at least knows the difference between summative and formative assessment and that's still a foreign language in some schools. And part of that is because we had an administrator that got things going here.

I added that "our professional learning community" along with decentralized leadership, has also been important to building teacher capacity for a variety of changes:

> If you don't have a professional learning community in your school, then you don't have the structure in place to make some of these things happen, especially in a huge school like ours.

Sharing our Work with the School Literacy Team

Sagor (2000) identified "reporting results" and "taking informed action" as the final steps of the action research process (pp. 3,4). The Literacy Inquiry Team met together for the seventh and final time this semester on January 13, 2010. The purpose of this meeting was to share the results of our study with a newly formed school Literacy Team, a team that was represented by several teacher leaders from a range of teaching areas, our school librarian, and a vice principal. I asked each of the members of the Literacy Inquiry Team to speak about the literacy instructional improvements he or she made and to comment on his or her perceptions about the effectiveness of these changes. I also asked each member of our team to speak about the challenges of implementing these literacy improvements. Finally, I asked each member to look ahead to next semester and comment on whether or not he or she will continue to make improvements to literacy instruction and to share their ideas about further opportunities for improvement.

Terry

Terry began by sharing the improvements she made in her Combined Studies 10 class this semester. She admitted that increasing the volume of reading in her classroom will continue to be a priority:

> Absolutely. I am going to continue doing the reading…I think that more is better. I'm going to keep doing what I'm doing because I'm pretty encouraged by it.

She also identified specific opportunities to improve her teaching of literacy. For example, she discussed opportunities to assist her students to think deeply about reading and she identified several creative ways for her students to demonstrate their learning:

> More specific engagement and responses with texts. I think getting them in deeper. I have a few strategies here. Visual verbal essays can be done with nonfiction too. Some kids can demonstrate their learning in different ways, and it doesn't always have to be with language. Because a lot of our students, especially our at risk kids, they can express what they are thinking, but they are not very good writers. And I still think it's important to get them to produce writing, but let's be honest. When they leave school, they're not going to be writing for a living. If they can express themselves orally, use a PowerPoint, or I have them do visual verbal essays where they use images and symbols to express what they are learning. You can do that with nonfiction as well. And it still makes them accountable for what they are learning and it can be very specific. They still have to come up with main ideas and theme, but they get to create that in different ways.

Terry suggested that giving students more access to computers is important as well because typing makes it possible for students to communicate quickly. Furthermore, word processing software makes it much easier for students to edit and correct their writing:

> I have the advantage of having computers in my classroom. And I can't speak highly enough about that. Most of my students can type faster than they can write. So they can get those thoughts out there. They can print it out. I can look at it, I can see if we're on the right track, I can sit beside them and we can edit as we go. It is so good for kids to have access to that.

I asked Terry what she perceives to be the largest challenge in teaching literacy. She shared her belief that student apathy is a "huge issue that we all face," because despite our best efforts to provide students with opportunities to learn, not all students see their learning as relevant and meaningful:

> Some students don't care about their learning because they don't think it's relevant. We do a really good job at this school bending over backwards to give these students opportunities to hand in work late, to get extra help, but we all struggle with students who don't and won't. That's a very deep rooted issue that I believe we need to deal with before we start layering all of these initiatives to help them. They have to want to do that. And if they think it's more relevant, then that's a step in the right direction.

One of the members of the school Literacy Team wanted to know if the problem was really student apathy or is it really a case of many students being too busy with their schedules and other commitments to focus on school. Terry suggested that busy students are often high achievers and that many students who are not busy with commitments outside of school time are still disengaged from their learning. She explained that if her students do not perceive their learning as relevant, then often they will refuse to learn:

> You and I both know that some of our busiest students are also our most academic kids. And I do have a lot of kids who can't engage and are at-risk kids. And they don't have a history of success. And they are quite prepared to accept failure and disengage. And I have a few kids in my class who don't have part time jobs. Their parents are very supportive of me trying to help them, but they just don't engage because it isn't relevant to them. They don't believe that knowing anything about Confederation is really what they need to know. And maybe they're right [she laughs].

She added that it is easier in some classes to make learning relevant, but in content heavy courses, such as Social Studies, this is more of a challenge:

> And I honestly think some curriculum is irrelevant and that's what kids don't engage. You know, if I want to be a welder, then I'm probably not going to be engaged by a lot of the stuff that my teacher is trying to make me do. So you have to kind of pick and choose. And in English, this is easy. It's not so easy

> when you are facing a Social Studies curriculum. It's still kind of doable, but it's in the approach.

I asked Terry to share her thoughts about how we might encourage other teachers to make improvements to how they teach literacy. Terry suggested that "modeling and sharing" our ideas with others is the first step:

> It would be nice if in a really abbreviated form we could share some of these strategies in a staff meeting or in some kind of professional development day capacity in the next little while. Bring your best stuff. Offer it and I'm sure there will be twenty or thirty teachers that will be happy to show up and share strategies.

The general consensus of the school literacy team was that teachers want the takeaways that can be implemented immediately. Terry agreed that busy teachers are most interested in "things that they can take away on Friday and use on Monday" but that they would benefit from the support and guidance of teachers that have made instructional improvements in teaching literacy and have evaluated their success.

Sharon

Sharon shared the instructional changes she made this semester as well as her perceptions of why these changes were effective. I asked Sharon if she plans to continue to make improvements to literacy instruction. She shared that she will continue to make both reading and writing the focus in teaching Family Studies 12 and Planning 11:

> I already have things planned for next semester where right from the very beginning we'll look at paragraph structure, because we do a lot of writing. I want to bring in some more nonfiction reading samples. And I might even do a novel study with Planning. I thought it was so fun. The kids were totally into it. And we did do lots of read alouds, and I gave out candy to kids that read aloud. We usually had three or four kids read aloud each day.

She also added that she would like to have Terry come and work with her students during her literacy coaching block.

Sharon did see some opportunities to make specific improvements. For example, even though her Family Studies 12 class read a novel this semester, she decided that they could read more. She added that that all of her students could read more if she makes reading a priority:

> I've going to continue to work at the writing expectations and try to provide more opportunity for reading. I found it really tight this year. I'm struggling with losing the time for DPA (Daily Physical Activity), and I have not provided enough opportunity for reading, and that's something that I'm going to focus on.

When I asked her for her thoughts on building capacity, Sharon suggested that many teachers in our school are comfortable working collaboratively with others, and that through learning teams like the school Literacy Team, we will continue to build capacity as we share instructional strategies that have a positive effect on student learning:

> I think a lot of it could happen in our school, especially the way that we're set up, with the Literacy Team, through collaboration, and getting into other's classrooms, and getting out there are sharing stuff [with other teachers], and encouraging fiction and nonfiction.

She also added that teachers and students might benefit from having student tutors join their classes from the peer tutoring program. She explained that it frees up teachers to work individually with students when "you have an extra pair of hands" in the classroom.

Natalie

Natalie shared with the school Literacy Team the instructional improvements she made this semester in her Art 11 and 12 and Social Studies 10 classes. She added that she began this semester with good intentions of increasing reading volume in both classes, but she quickly "abandoned" her goal of introducing more reading in art:

> I started out with this idea that I'd add more reading in art, but I abandoned this. We hadn't done a lot of reading before, and I gave them examples and told them

> what it all meant. And the reading levels are so varied because you've got special needs kids too. And students get frustrated because they don't understand enough of the terms to figure out what it all means. If you're not into art, it's a lot more complicated than I realized it was going to be.

She had more success with increasing the reading volume in her Social Studies 10 class and was able to supplement the textbook with short reads she found online and then printed and photocopied for her students:

> I went forward with Socials 10 and it went well. I brought in more readings and I thought it was excellent because, the text is fine and really well set up and has all kinds of things for them to read, but when I was giving them something that was different from that they maybe took more ownership in reading that because I could say, "I'm collecting this in fifteen minutes" and they couldn't just say "I'll take this home."

I asked her if she would continue to make improvements to literacy instruction next semester and she agreed that she would. She explained that it is important for her to change her repertoire of activities and instructional strategies, and that finding new resources and ideas has helped her to find "ways to improve":

> I had sort of been stuck doing the same thing and was in a bit of a track, and you forget some of the things. And I was using some of the things in the Reading 44 (1999) book in the Humanities staffroom and thinking, I'd like to try some of this. And it's important to change things up. And this is the first year that I've taught these things again, and so I found ways to improve. The first time you teach something you just want to get it out.

Natalie also discussed other opportunities for improvement, including using more activities that help students to synthesize information and demonstrate their learning, using other strategies to help stimulate student discussion, and helping students to see the relevance of what they are learning in both Art and Social Studies:

> Strange as it seems, as I am an Art teacher, I don't like to make posters. I want to do more things like that because it helps students to break down information. Some of the attitudes too - my class does not love to do discussion and they are very quiet. Apathy too, so showing students the relevance of things.

One of the members of the school Literacy Team commented that the instructional strategies Natalie used in teaching Social Studies 10 were less teacher-centered and that they encouraged her students to be constructors of their own learning. The general consensus of the MSS Literacy Team was that this approach would be much more meaningful to students than simply giving them information and asking them to memorize it. Terry concurred, adding that activities such as asking students to synthesize their learning in a poster format are useful because "kids think in pictures and they express themselves really well that way." Natalie agreed, and added that her students were much more motivated about learning if they were asked to work with what they have learned and create something new:

> I used to say, "well, these things are important and will be on the test." That's not a motivator for them. Making the poster was. And kids remember the info that way. If only we could do that more, because that took a whole day, right. I would probably cut out the first things we did that weren't that exciting for them. I would give them the information and say that they need to talk about it and I'll come around and listen. And you need to tell me what it is, or we could even jigsaw the same information.

Knowing that many of the teachers on the school Literacy Team teach courses in which it is difficult to cover the content of the curriculum in a short amount of time, I asked Natalie to comment on whether she felt it was difficult to cover the curriculum while introducing new literacy instructional strategies. Natalie admitted that it was a challenge at first, but that she quickly realized that it is not essential to cover everything in the textbook:

> I got behind when I first started this but next semester I'll just start by using the strategies. But there are things that we can say we don't need to do or cover. There are things that I like to do in Social Studies, and we may not get to doing it, but it's not all necessary. Initially it is a bit of time [to learn and teach the strategies] but it won't be next semester.

I asked her how we might build further capacity for improved literacy instruction at our school and Natalie suggested that the teachers in her Social Studies department are using technology to make it easier to share teaching resources:

> We do a good job in our departments of sharing things using our share folders on the computer. So this might be a good place to post some of these strategies. I like to go to the share folder at night when I'm trying to think of ideas.

Although not all departments are using technology to create repositories for electronic lesson plans, Natalie suggested that most teachers at our school are comfortable working in collaborative teams, so it is really just a matter of encouraging teachers to use an efficient method for storing and sharing our new ideas and strategies.

Shane

Shane explained the various changes he made to literacy instruction in his French 11 and Beginner Spanish 11 classes. Although he only tried a few comprehension strategies this semester, he stated that he intends to experiment with other comprehension strategies and use them more frequently in the future:

> Oh yeah, in terms of looking at it more in using more strategies, definitely. With languages you get caught up in the curriculum, and it's easy to push that stuff to the side or to make the easy assignments because they don't take long. But I want to incorporate more of these strategies. I want to start using them a lot more than I have been.

He also added that he will "continue to use writing templates because this is very useful for [teaching] languages."

One of the members of the school Literacy Team suggested that although these strategies are not new, they are tried, proven, and reliable. He explained that most of us learned to use these strategies in university and in various workshops; however, despite their effectiveness, many of us stopped using them for one reason or another. I added that

it might be because "somehow the curriculum always seems to creep in and eventually we find ourselves handcuffed to it." Shane acknowledged that time pressure to cover the curriculum was the greatest challenge, but he also suggested that this had more to do with a misconception that literacy was something that needed to be taught separately from the curriculum:

> Challenges were the curriculum, yeah. And I do find that I'm a little but behind from where I normally am, but I think that that is more of a mindset. If I were to recreate the way that I teach it and incorporate these strategies in, well I'd be changing the way I teach anyway, so where I used to be in the past is almost irrelevant. You know, you just reform what you're doing and it'll fall into place. And that's kind of what I find is happening is that I'm remaking things, not necessarily whole assignments, but remaking the way I'm doing things, and it's falling into place. And everything will be covered; it's just that I did it in a different way.

Shane did not have much to add regarding building further capacity for literacy improvement, but he did mention that "the best way to get other language teachers on board is through the local specialist's association."

Steve

I was the last member of the Literacy Inquiry Team to share my findings. I explained that I was encouraged by the progress my students made this semester. I also shared that, although certain improvements I made were effective, I have learned a lot from the experience, and I will continue with some improvements and make changes to others that were not as effective:

> Certain things I will change or scrap altogether. I know what those things are and why they don't work. I think they just need to be tweaked. And I have to spend some more time digging for better nonfiction reading materials for grade eights. The other thing is that I'd never worked with struggling grade eight readers and I haven't taught grade eight for a long time, so I think I had a false perception about how things would turn out. I'm not going to turn everybody into a reader in one semester but I do know that those grade eights will come away from this with some tools that they can use. And by the end I was seeing

> them use the strategies on their own. So they learned it. I'm going to continue next semester to make changes.

I also acknowledged that there are some things that I stopped doing so that I could make more time for my students to read and incorporate more choice in reading materials. I explained that I had mixed feelings about giving up literature circles this semester:

> Last year I did some great things with lit circles and this semester I didn't get a chance to do that. I think there are some really cool things in doing lit circles. I think it's the trying things and seeing what works best. This time it was choice, and when you give that much choice you have to be willing to let go some things. For instance, there is less opportunity to have group or class discussions, and it's a little harder to guide the students' understanding. I do know that with choice my students have read a little more, and that's good. When we do lit circles, there is a little less choice, but I can hear those group discussions and that is meaningful too.

I also discovered that it was necessary to make other changes to the curriculum in order to accommodate extra silent reading time. For instance, I did not have enough time to do an entire speech unit, so after reading their novels, students were asked to do a short audiovisual presentation for the class.

The other big challenge was "finding nonfiction reads that are both interesting and accessible for grade eights who struggle with reading." I did manage to find many good nonfiction articles, but I found that the selection of nonfiction books in our library were too difficult for many students, and so students had a difficult time choosing books that were a good fit. This, however, is a small problem that can easily be addressed because our library welcomes input from teachers about what books to order. Another option might be to search for cheap or used books, or even discards, that are interesting and accessible for struggling readers, to add these to my classroom library.

My final thoughts were about how we might encourage other teachers to make improvements to how they teach literacy. I shared my belief that instructional change will

take time. I suggested that we have started several excellent literacy initiatives already, and through sharing ideas with other teachers in the leaning community and modeling what works, people will hear about our work. When we support teachers who try new things in their own classrooms, we all play a role in discovering new ways to improve teaching and learning:

> Last year we started with a book club, and we got some people interested in literacy, and that was great. Last year we started a school literacy team and had some really good conversations about things that we can improve. And last year we talked about doing action research, and now we've actually been through the process. So I think it's slowly evolving. I think it's simply a matter of getting people from various areas together and saying, "Hey, these are some ways that we can improve learning. Here are some ways to encourage kids to go a little deeper. We can show you how." You know, I believe that our job is to show others that this is not rocket science. Because, if you are cognizant about the quality of the reading materials you use in your class, you teach students to use some simple reading tools, and make reading an expectation and a priority for your classes, they actually will read.

Changes in our Mental Models

Hume (2008), in discussing the research done by Senge, suggested that teachers have mental models or beliefs that are "formed by our history, experiences, and our personality" (p. 21). She added that teachers often rely on these beliefs when solving problems or making changes to instruction. When faced with challenging situations, we turn to these mental models "to lock in on something that worked for us before" (p. 21). Likewise, each of the members of the Literacy Inquiry Team brought their own mental models to the inquiry. Our mental models about literacy instruction and student learning were shaped by many things, including our perceptions of what teaching and learning looks like in each of our unique teaching areas and the amount of knowledge and experience each of us had with teaching literacy. In this section I will discuss my observations of the shifts that each of us made to our mental models. I will also be using

The Concerns Based Adoption Model (Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987), to identify the kinds of concerns each of us had as we made our instructional changes. *The Concerns Based Adoption Model* is reprinted in Appendix C.

Shane

When we first met on September 11, Shane had some concerns about teaching comprehension strategies in his French 11 class. He argued that French is different from other courses because it requires teaching students "a two step process" in which students translate words and then comprehend readings in their entirety. He also added that a reading program would be difficult to implement because most of his reading materials are written a level that is too advanced for his French 11 students. Shane's mental model was that literacy strategies are not easily adapted for languages classes. Furthermore, he believed that changes in literacy instruction meant he would have to incorporate a silent reading program and encourage his students to read difficult texts. His overall level of concern suggested to me that his mental model was that his teaching methods were working fine and French 11 was not the ideal place to make instructional improvements to teaching literacy. After referring to the *Concerns Based Adoption Model* (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987), I could see that Shane was at the second stage of concern: he had some knowledge of the innovation; however, more information would help lesson the anxiety he was feeling about making these improvements in his French 11 class. (For reference purposes, I have reprinted the *Concerns Based Adoption Model* in Appendix C).

After working with Cheryl, our District Curriculum Administrator, Shane had learned a few pre and post-reading strategies that he could use with his French 11

students. She had also given him some direction for finding more accessible reading materials. Shane was beginning to feel more comfortable, and as a result, he seemed much more willing to make some simple instructional improvements. By our October 15 meeting, I could already see a positive shift in Shane's mental models. He had decided that he would focus his classroom inquiry on the use of pre and post-reading strategies in his French 11 class. Furthermore, he decided to make improvements to how he teaches writing to his Beginner Spanish 11 students.

After teaching his students to use the *KWL* strategy in October, Shane suggested that the strategy was "useful because students could demonstrate their learning." Nevertheless, he also believed that "activities such as KWL should not take too much class time." I believe that his mental model about the usefulness of teaching literacy strategies was evolving; however, he still believed that literacy instruction was a set of instructional tasks that had little to do with helping his students to learn the content of his French 11 class. After teaching KWL, Shane felt pressured for time to cover the content of his French course. He had not yet made the shift in his mental models to understand that these instructional improvements were intended to help his students to comprehend, to think deeply, and to learn the content of his course. Instead, he was still thinking about the day to day management of his French course and literacy instruction was still an add-on. According the *Concerns Based Adoption Model* (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987), Shane was now at the third stage of concern, also known as "task" focused (p. 32). He wondered how he would "find time to do this" and his "attention was devoted to organizational and management issues, as well as time demands" (p. 32).

I could see a significant shift in Shane's thinking by our fifth meeting on December 9. After using pre and post-reading strategies for several weeks, he maintained that his students "could see reading comprehension was important, and not just the marks." I believe that Shane also discovered something similar about his own thinking. After making instructional improvements part of the daily routine, his students understood, as did Shane, that reading comprehension activities were "not just another assignment." I could sense that Shane understood that he had changed his students' beliefs from a focus on marks to a focus on learning. Shane made a similar shift in his own mental models after seeing the long term effectiveness of using the strategies. He no longer perceived literacy instruction as an add-on; instead, these instructional strategies became a vital part of student learning. He also seemed to shift from a very teacher-centered task focus toward a more student-centered impact focus where he was more cognizant of how these instructional improvements were affecting students. According to the *Concerns Based Adoption Model* (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987), he was now at the fourth stage of concern.

By January 13, 2010, when we met with the MSS Literacy Team to share our work, I could see that Shane had made some major shifts in his mental models. He was very open to sharing his ideas with the MSS Literacy Team, and my perception was that he was at the fifth stage of concern according to the *Concerns Based Adoption Model* (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987). His language suggested a growing confidence in making improvements to literacy instruction and in being part of the inquiry process. He used the language of collaborative inquiry in sharing that he "intends to experiment" with other improvements in the future. He also shared that, although he

initially "felt pressure to cover the curriculum," he now understood the value of literacy instruction. He admitted that his early mental model was that literacy was something that was taught independently of the French curriculum; he added that this was a "misconception." He added that time pressures were "more of a mindset." I could see that Shane firmly believed in the changes that he had made. Hume (2008) would argue that he had "act[ed] his way into a new way of thinking" and changed his old mental models after seeing the effectiveness of a new approach (p. 27). I agree. Shane's final statement to the MSS Literacy Team was very casual and demonstrated that he had acquired a new sense of confidence in his teaching:

> You know, you just reform what you're doing and it'll fall into place. Everything will be covered; it's just that I did it in a different way.

Sharon

Sharon's early mental model was that students do not take writing assignments seriously in elective courses. She suggested that students could write better if this was part of her expectation. She added that students do take more care with writing assignments in English Language Arts classes. Interestingly, although one third of her Family Studies 12 class admitted that they do not read much outside of school, reading did not seem to be an issue for her. She believed that these results were "pretty good." Increasing the reading volume in elective courses was not part of her mental model. Nevertheless, Sharon was keen to develop an awareness of strategies she could use to help her students to improve their writing. She was also optimistic that she could find ways to make her Family Studies 12 and Planning 11 classes more relevant to her students. Sharon was at stage one, also labeled the "self" stage on the *Concerns Based Adoption Model* (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987). She was eager to

gather more information from myself and from Terry, our school's literacy coach, and looking forward to getting started with the research.

I could see a significant shift in Sharon's thinking during our October 29th meeting. Although she was still somewhat focused on tasks, she was beginning to think about the role literacy instruction played in teaching students to think. Her thoughts about writing expectations were still somewhat teacher-focused. There was evidence of this in one of her research questions when she asked "what evidence is there that having proper writing expectations in elective classes will improve written work?" Nevertheless, she admitted that teaching the KWL strategy was making learning relevant by helping students to establish background knowledge. She even found new uses for the KWL strategy; she discovered that her students no longer copied notes directly from the textbook and instead they would use their pre-reading questions and brainstorming work to support them with their writing. Looking back at our earlier meetings, Sharon now seemed more cognizant of the writing process when she shared her thoughts about the quality of writing. According to the *Concerns Based Adoption Model* (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987), Sharon was thinking about the "impact" (the fourth stage of concern) her literacy improvements were having on students (p. 37). She was also embracing KWL and finding ways to refocus and improve the innovation, which is stage six of the model.

By our fifth meeting on December 9, Sharon had made another shift in her mental models. She was no longer just concerned about improving the quality writing; instead, she decided to make her assessment more formative by providing increased feedback to students regarding their progress and more opportunities for improvement. She was

beginning to establish a culture of improvement in her class, which demonstrated that she had made a shift from a teacher-centered approach that focuses on improving the quality of a finished written product to a student-centered approach that focuses on improving the learning process itself. She was concerned about the impact her instructional improvements were having on students. According to the *Concerns Based Adoption Model* (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987), she was at the sixth stage of concern; she now "own[ed] the innovation" and was able to make adaptations to her assessment methods to reinforce the learning (Hume, 2008, p. 32).

By the end of our inquiry, Sharon believed in the power of collaborative work to build capacity. She demonstrated that she had found her collaborative voice when she suggested that our team had developed a "collaborative sense and collaborative abilities." This new shift in thinking was also evident when she shared her thoughts about collaboration with the MSS Literacy Team:

> I think a lot of it could happen in our school, especially the way that we're set up, with the Literacy Team, through collaboration, and getting into other's classrooms and getting out there and sharing stuff [with other teachers].

Natalie

Natalie's early mental model was that "students do not take writing assignments seriously." She also expressed a concern that her students did not feel that "reading and writing [were] Socials or Art things." She had ideas about incorporating literacy improvements in both Social Studies 10 and Art 11 and 12; however, she found it "painful" to make reading a priority in Art so she decided to focus on making improvements in her Social Studies class. Like Shane, Natalie was somewhat task-

focused and concerned about time pressures to implement literacy improvements and still cover the content of her courses.

By our third meeting on October 15, she had some experience teaching her Social Studies 10 students the *KWL* strategy. I could see a shift in Natalie's thinking. Although she still believed that time was an issue, she was beginning to see the positive results of her instructional improvements. She said that student writing was "much more focused" and students were starting "to develop their own voice" in their writing. She was shifting her thinking from a task and management focus, the third stage of concern according to the *Concerns Based Adoption Model* (Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987), to an impact and consequence focus (stage four). She was starting to see how literacy improvements were affecting student learning.

By our fourth meeting on December 9, Natalie continued to shift her thinking. At the beginning of her study she was concerned about student writing. She was now more concerned about deepening her students' thinking. She continued to practice with the use of the *KWL* strategy and she had been teaching her students to use the *SEA* model to organize their thinking. She had adapted several strategies that she had learned about, and developed new uses for graphic organizers and posters, which is the sixth stage of concern according to the *Concerns Based Adoption Model* (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987). With practice, many of her Social Studies 10 students were using some of these strategies on their own to organize their thinking before writing. I felt that Natalie was much more concerned about deepening the learning process and that she was beginning to understand that literacy improvements were not an add-on, but rather a more effective way of teaching the content of her courses.

By the end of our inquiry, Natalie shared that collaboration with the Literacy Inquiry Team as well as continued practice with new instructional strategies was helping her to make some significant shifts to her mental models. She spoke about the importance of sharing resources and ideas and trying new things in order to expand her repertoire of instructional strategies. She believed that becoming more comfortable with these new strategies had helped her to focus more on building student capacity for learning and less on "getting [the content] out." Furthermore, she admitted that "it was not essential to cover everything in the textbook."

Terry

Unlike the other members of the Literacy Inquiry Team, who began the inquiry with limited experience and knowledge about literacy instruction, Terry already had many years of experience with teaching literacy instruction as both a classroom teacher and a school literacy coach. She did not have to "act her way into a new way of thinking"; she began the study with a firm belief in her abilities to use literacy instruction as a way to build student capacity for deeper learning (Hume, 2008, p. 27). At our second meeting on September 28th, I could already see that Terry had a sense of capacity for helping both students and teachers to acquire tools for learning across the curriculum. She shared that helping students to read more difficult nonfiction reads was important because it provided students with reading comprehension strategies that they could use in many subject areas. Terry's mindset was that her role as teacher was to help her students to become better learners:

> And that's where I'm going with this now. A lot of them do not like to read nonfiction because it's hard for them, but they don't see it as particularly relevant. Although, when I asked them, "do you think it's important for you to become a

> good reader?" they said "yes."I asked "Why?" "Because we need to read to get it [information]."

At every step of the inquiry, Terry demonstrated that she was concerned about the impact her instructional improvements were having on student learning. After teaching her students to use the *KWL* strategy, she worked to adapt it and improve it and then she used it to teach the paragraph writing process. Later, she adapted the strategy for a reading and writing activity. Terry continued to implement a wide range of instructional improvements throughout the semester, all designed to "encourage [her] students to take risks" and "go deeper with their thinking," to "read more" and to take responsibility for their learning by using simple strategies to "self-correct." According to the *Concerns Based Adoption Model* (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987), owning and improving an innovation is evidence of the sixth level of concern. Terry owned the innovations she taught, and with practice, so did her students.

By our final meeting, Terry shared with the MSS Literacy Team her plans to continue to find ways to help her students to deepen their thinking and take responsibility for their own learning. She also shared her insights on opportunities to build further capacity for literacy improvement at MSS. She suggested that her desire was to help other teachers to change their own mindsets about literacy instruction, to help them to understand that instructional improvements are not neatly packaged "things that they can take away on Friday and use on Monday." Terry's goal was to focus on guiding other teachers through their efforts to help ensure the success of these changes. Curiously, Terry did not share her thoughts about the power of inquiry teams as a method for inviting others to collaborate and make instructional improvements. I believe that as a literacy coach she still saw the value of getting into other teacher's classrooms and

affecting change one classroom at a time. Her mental models about teacher collaboration were heavily influenced by her role as literacy coach. She did not suggest that she had considered inquiry teams to be the best way for teachers to explore and learn and to construct shared meaning and stronger beliefs about student learning. Instead, she still believed in a mentoring model in which "teachers benefit...from the support and guidance of [other] teachers" who have made instructional improvements.

Steve

Like Terry, I came to the study with some previous experience teaching strategies to help students to think deeper. I had also experimented with instructional changes that encourage students to read more while providing students with a choice of reading materials. Before we began the study, I had also reviewed a considerable number of books and articles and so I had learned about other instructional improvements and considered the potential benefits of implementing changes to my teaching. Unlike most of the other members of the Literacy Inquiry Team, I did not have to "act [my] way" into a belief about the importance of implementing a more thoughtful literacy program in my classroom (Hume, 2007, p. 27). Nevertheless, my thinking about collaborative inquiry as an effective method for helping teachers to learn did evolve throughout this study.

Before we began our inquiry, I expressed some concerns that teachers might not make significant changes to their teaching. The literature had influenced my earliest mental models and I had some powerful preconceptions about what I believed were the most effective literacy improvements. As a result, I was apprehensive that without pushing them to make specific improvements, the members of the Literacy Inquiry Team might not incorporate what I believed to be the most important changes, such as

increasing reading volume and supplementing course content with accessible, high-interest reading materials.

My mental models began to shift as I began to see that each member of the team had developed new learning from the results of his or her efforts. At first I was worried that Shane and Natalie were not moving forward quickly enough. We had worked collaboratively to explore the *KWL* strategy and I was optimistic that each of us would move on to explore other instructional strategies once we had tried this very simple, albeit effective strategy. Shane decided to continue with this strategy in his inquiry, as did Natalie. Part of me wanted to urge them to try something else to expand their instructional repertoires; however, after several weeks I could see that their continued efforts with using the KWL strategy were helping them to make these innovations their own. Over the weeks, Shane and Natalie adapted pre-reading strategies to deepen student learning and students were also beginning to use the strategies on their own. When Shane and Natalie spoke about this stage of the inquiry, I could see that both teachers had shifted their thinking. Literacy strategies were no longer a series of tasks, taught separately from the content of their courses; instead, they could see that literacy instruction was about helping students to learn. Shane and Natalie helped me to change my own thinking about inquiry. I have come to realize that it is not important that teachers make many instructional improvements. I agree with Fullan's (2007) argument that before teachers can "secure new beliefs and higher expectations – critical to improvement – people first need new experiences that lead them to different beliefs" (p. 58). I am convinced that teachers will make significant shifts in their thinking once they see that one or two instructional improvements can have a significant impact on student

learning. It is up to teachers to decide which of these instructional improvements is the most meaningful. The most important thing is that teachers make this shift in thinking.

I have developed new mental models about teaching, learning, and collaborative inquiry. After leading the team through the inquiry, I believe these teachers will continue to make instructional improvements. By the end of our inquiry, each of the members of the Literacy Inquiry Team made significant shifts in their thinking. All of us believed that literacy instruction was having a positive impact on student learning. Furthermore, each of us could identify new opportunities for making improvements. I am now less concerned about pushing members of an inquiry team to make too many improvements at once. Instead, I will encourage teachers to make simple changes that are meaningful for them, and encourage them to monitor the impact this is having on student learning. My thinking has changed; teachers can "act their way into a new way of thinking," although some of us, myself included, are more inclined to shift belief first and then adopt corresponding practices (Hume, 2008, p. 27). I now believe that once teachers make this shift in their mental models then they will likely feel more comfortable experimenting with other instructional improvements. In reflecting back to my earliest mental models, I still believe that increasing reading volume is one of the most important strategies for improving student literacy. However, I now believe in a more thoughtful and cautious approach to improving literacy in which teachers are encouraged to experiment with instructional improvements and to examine and change their own mental models throughout the process. I believe that collaborative inquiry teams are an effective approach for helping teachers to develop these new ways of thinking about student learning.

V. CONCLUSION

This study recounts the experiences of five secondary school teachers, including myself, who were working collaboratively to explore opportunities for improving literacy instruction and deepening student learning in each of our unique teaching areas. This was an opportunity for us to experiment with making instructional changes and to share our perceptions of these improvements. This study is also a personal journey and self-reflection of my leadership abilities as I led the team. The data derived from literature, interview transcripts, reflexive journal notes, casual conversations and student work have provided new insights into how literacy instruction can be implemented in a diverse range of teaching areas. The results of this study also provide insight into the skills and personal commitment that is necessary in leading a team of teachers through the process of collaborative inquiry.

In Chapter I, I introduced the research questions and outlined the purpose of the study. I also expressed my desire to use the results of this inquiry to help me to lead other teachers to make further improvements to literacy instruction. I shared my optimism that the knowledge gained from this study might help me to lead a team of teachers to create a school-wide vision of literacy improvement. I also hoped that the literature and my experiences with collaborative inquiry might provide some insights into how we might make these changes sustainable. In Chapter II, I explored the literature to gather information and to establish further context for the study. Some of the topics included specific strategies for increasing reading volume, assessing reading materials for readability, as well as strategies that can be taught to students to increase reading comprehension and deepen thinking. I also explored the topics of group work and

differentiated instruction. Other topics focused on teacher leadership and learning communities. The literature explored the benefits of establishing collaborative inquiry teams and professional readings teams and provided some insight for building teacher capacity for a school-wide focus on literacy improvement.

In Chapter III, I justified professional inquiry, informed by action research, as my research method. The remainder of the chapter is a detailed account of the process of inquiry I used for the study. This section includes an explanation about Sagor's (2000) seven-step action research process, which I used to provide a direction for the inquiry process.

In Chapter IV, I shared the experiences of the Literacy Inquiry Team as we moved through each step of the inquiry process. We began with a similar vision that teaching literacy was our responsibility, and each of us made the commitment to ourselves and to the team to make instructional improvements that will have a positive effect on student learning. After sharing our beliefs about literacy and learning, we established a simple yet effective plan in which we would experiment an instructional strategy, gather data from similar sources, and collaborate about the results. Once team norms were established, I gradually relinquished responsibility (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) to each of the team members to conduct his or her own classroom inquiry. Team members now had the responsibility of creating their own classroom inquiry questions and choosing instructional strategies to experiment with. We also had to create our own data collection plans.

I was able to gather some interesting data and make a comprehensive analysis based on the instructional improvements teachers made and their perceptions of these

changes. Initially, the members of the team with less knowledge and experience with teaching literacy expressed more concern about having enough time to cover the content of their courses. After several weeks of experimentation, all of the teachers on the Literacy Inquiry Team could see a connection between teaching literacy and empowering students with strategies that they can use to help them to learn course content. As a result, each of us agreed that we would continue to make improvements to our instruction when the study was completed. Likewise, although some teachers refused to commit class time to sustained silent reading, by the end of the study, the same teachers expressed a desire to invite students to read more. For many of the members of the team, a change in teaching practice led to a change in mental models; all of the teachers on the team now believed in the effectiveness of their instructional improvements.

In Chapter IV, I also explored the leadership skills that are needed to lead a collaborative inquiry team with a focus on improving literacy instruction. At each step of the inquiry process, I evaluated my progress in leading the Literacy Inquiry Team and created an inventory of skills that I had acquired and areas in which I still needed to develop. A few of the many leadership skills that I had acquired included the ability to create a safe and supportive environment for sharing and collaboration, the ability to establish a shared vision for improvement, the ability to support the members of the team by connecting them to resources and people with expertise, and the ability to maintain a balance between guiding and supporting team members while encouraging them to experiment with making instructional changes. Perhaps the most important aspect of my leadership learning was the importance of teacher choice for meaningful inquiry.

A School-Wide Focus on Improving Literacy

This study has helped me to see how literacy instructional strategies can be researched, shared, and developed by an inquiry team. The collaborative work of the Literacy Inquiry Team has also demonstrated to me that inquiry teams can be an effective way for teachers to build shared meaning (Fullan, 2007) about the benefits of making instructional improvements. Collaborative inquiry was an effective method for building capacity for change within the inquiry team, and regardless of our unique teaching areas, each of us made instructional changes, and decided that we would continue to do so in the future. What is not clear, however, is how we will build further capacity outside of the Literacy Inquiry Team.

There is a distinct difference between building shared meaning and establishing a vision. Sagor (2000) described vision as "an agreement of all key players to pull in the same direction" (p. 165). Shared meaning is different. Shared meaning is developed over time "though interaction" and "involves constantly refining knowledge" (Fullan, 2007, p. 38). While the members of an inquiry team might make a commitment to improving literacy, this study has shown me that it takes time to build shared meaning. Before we began the inquiry, each of the members of the Literacy Inquiry Team agreed that teaching literacy was important. We had a shared vision. However, some of us did not make the connection between teaching literacy and deepening student learning in each of our unique subject areas until many weeks into the inquiry. This shift in our mental models led to a shared meaning about the importance of improving how we teach students to make sense of all kinds of information. This construction of shared meaning is what inspired the members of the team to commit to making further instructional

improvements in the future. My assumption is supported by Fullan, who stated that when we "try out ideas" we build meaning, and this "meaning fuels motivation" (p. 39).

This study demonstrates a clear link between experimentation and the building of shared meaning that leads to personal commitment for sustainable change. However, without a school-wide vision for literacy improvement, I believe that it will be a challenge to build further capacity for change outside of the Literacy Inquiry Team. Over the last six years, the staff of Meadowview has been working to develop as a learning community. Furthermore, the principal has strongly encouraged a culture of experimentation and has supported a wide variety of school improvement initiatives that are championed by teacher leaders. The problem is, with so many different initiatives, teachers have not established a common vision for student success. Also, because of low success rates in both Science and Mathematics, the principal decided that supports and interventions were needed in these specific areas. Regardless of the connection between literacy and learning, improving literacy was not part of the school-wide vision.

Without an administrator-led, school-wide vision for improving literacy, I believe a more grass roots approach may be required to build further capacity for improvement. *Professional Readings Teams* (also know as *TAPERS*) may be a way to encourage teachers to find out more about literacy instructional strategies without having to make the time commitment to joining an inquiry team. I believe that sharing knowledge about the most effective ways to help students learn is the key to establishing a vision. Equally powerful is conversation about learning and instructional practices. Other than time, *Professional Readings Teams* require a fairly small commitment from teachers; however, I am optimistic that these teams will help to create a common vision and may inspire

teachers to make instructional changes or to join other teachers in forming inquiry teams. If possible, school principals can support the *Professional Readings Team* with resources, such books and time to collaborate. The principal might also assist the *Professional Readings Team* by contacting literacy experts in the district who can meet with the team and share advice and suggest additional resources.

Sustainability, Shared Meaning and Beliefs

Mitchell and Sackney (2009) argued that "deep changes in beliefs" are necessary for "learning communities to bear the fruit of deep authentic, sustainable learning" (p. 189). My experience tells me that changes in beliefs are only possible after teachers have made a firm commitment to the learning community to make changes to teaching practices, and after implementing these improvements, have seen the positive results of these changes first hand. The participants in this study began with a similar vision for improving literacy instruction. We also read about strategies and shared ideas about ways in which we could make instructional improvements. Nevertheless, we did not truly feel a sense of ownership in these changes until we experimented with instructional strategies and assessed the results. Meaning was constructed from these experiences, and this is what ultimately shaped our beliefs and supported our commitments to changed practice.

Mitchell and Sackney (2009) maintained that "managed-system models of schooling," in which teachers are forced to collaborate about various initiatives, invariably fail (pp. 188,189). I am not surprised. Without a shared vision, members of the team do not feel a sense of commitment to the initiative, and change is not sustainable if the members of the team do not find that their efforts are meaningful. If the team does not share a vision for success, the work will not be meaningful to all of the members of the

team. Likewise, we cannot expect that a lack of vision will lead to shared meaning and changes in beliefs. This study confirms Mitchell and Sackney's understanding about sustainability. It also suggests to me that it would be far more effective for principals to invite teachers to join collaborative teams and to support them in experimenting with instructional changes rather than forcing them to collaborate about initiatives that they do not necessarily support. I have seen evidence that teachers can change some strongly held mental models if they have vision and are committed to collaborative work and experimentation. I am optimistic that teachers can work collaboratively to develop deep and sustainable professional practices, but not without vision and a firm belief in the effectiveness of their efforts.

The members of our collaborative team were energized by our new learning. Each of us decided that we would continue with our instructional improvements after the study was completed. A few of us shared plans to delve deeper into teaching literacy, which included plans to experiment with instructional strategies we had not yet tried and plans to make silent reading an integral part of our instructional time. Mitchell and Sackney (2009) described learning communities as "living systems" that require energy if they are to flourish (p. 190). When teachers learn, "energy flow[s] into the system" (p. 190). Teachers learn through reading, sharing, and professional development activities; however, I would make the argument that the deepest learning involves experimentation and collaborative sharing. Mitchell and Sackney agreed. They argued that "good ideas that have been developed in another place by other people" are useful because they "inform...creative responses"; however, without experimentation, these ideas will not "make meaningful or long-lasting differences" to professional practice (p. 190). For

illustrative purposes, I have created the chart in Figure 41 to explain how vision, with experimentation, can lead to a sustainable change in our beliefs and teaching practices.

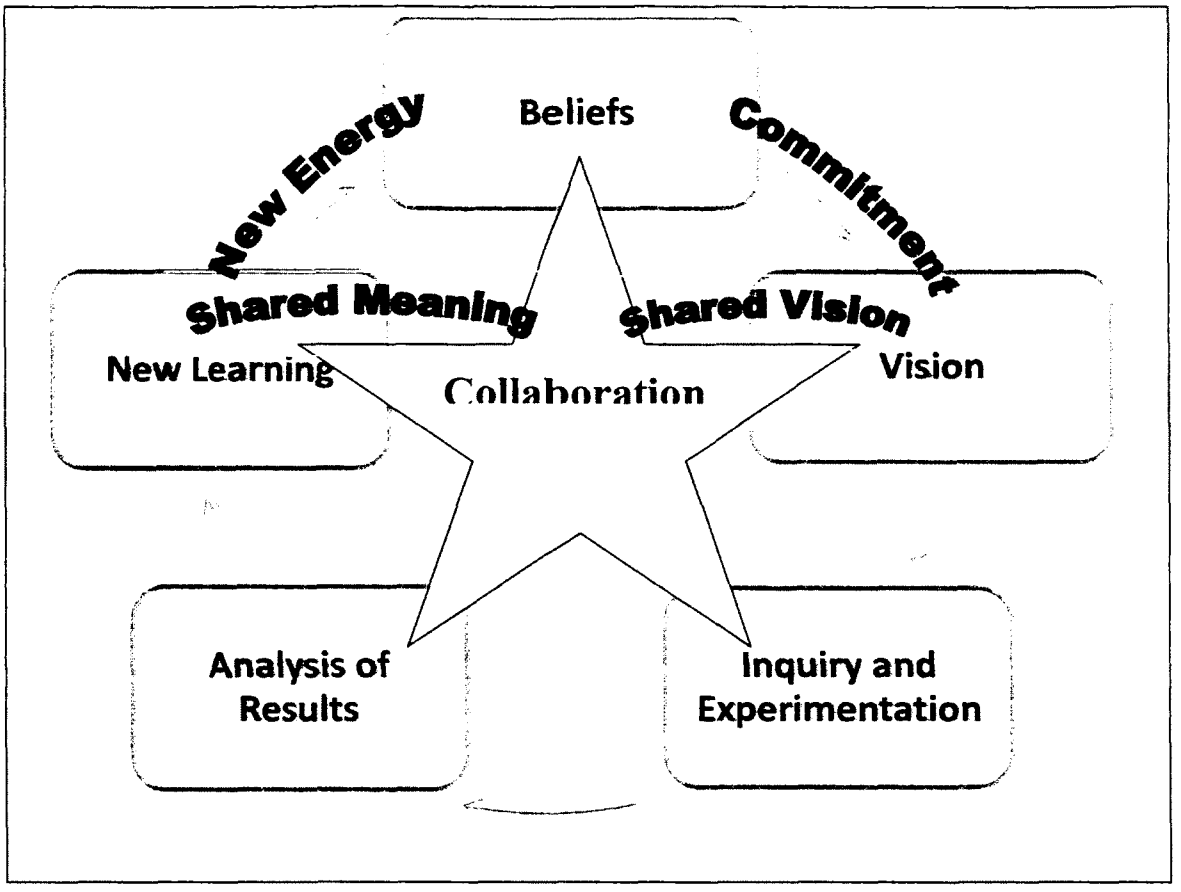

Figure 41. Vision to belief model.

My experience has shown me that the changes we have made will likely be sustainable, at least for the members of our inquiry team; however, the real challenge at MSS will be in building a vision for school-wide literacy improvement. Once again, I suggest that we begin the process of building vision by sharing knowledge. I am confident that each of the members of the team will play a role in this as new learning about literacy instruction and effective instructional strategies are shared with the various departments represented on the team. I am also optimistic that I can play a role in building this vision by inviting others to join *professional readings teams.* I believe that

once we have built a shared vision for literacy improvement and student success, we can strengthen these beliefs through collaborative inquiry teams.

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APPENDIX A: Readability and Accessibility of Our Texts

Book Title	Flesch Reading Score	Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	Text Features	Perceived Accessibility (Scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being most accessible)
Mythic Voices (1991) (Combined Studies 10)	79.2	6.9	Background notes, pronunciation key, table of contents, illustration for each myth, a few readings connected to myths	5
Horizons:Canada Moves West (1999) (Social Studies 10)	28.4	12	List of learning outcomes for each chapter, vignettes, glossary, activities, present day applications of ideas, summaries of main ideas, charts, pictures	5
Responses: Non-fiction in Context (1990) (Grade 8 Reading Program)	71.6	6.4	Images with captions, thoughtful questions in margins, chrats and diagrams, biographies of famous people, headings, activities and response questions	5
Imprints (2001) (English Language Arts 11)	77.1	6.3	Glossary, bold-faced words and definitions, response questions and activities, biographies of authors	3.5
Inside Stories (1993) (English Language Arts 12)	68.7	10.2	Introduction for key concepts (irony, symbol, etcetera), Glossary, questions for each story, items for further reading (interviews of authors, journal entries, article excerpts).	3
En Direct 1 (1993) (French 11)	58.8	11.4	Charts, images, bold-faced words and definitions, headings, key ideas in text boxes, glossary, vignettes, short interesting stories, cartoons, activities	3
Families Today (2004) (Family Studies)	49.3	9.4	Charts, images, bold-faced words and definitions, headings, key ideas in text boxes, glossary, vignettes, short interesting stories, reviews in the margins, emphasis on specific skills in activities in the margins	5
The Pigman (1968) (Family Studies)	78.9	6.4	Table of contents and chapter headings. A few rough sketches.	

APPENDIX B: Summary of Leadership Skills, Learning, and Goal Areas

Leadership skills I had demonstrated:

- Creating and maintaining a safe and respectful environment for sharing and collaborating
- Understanding that literacy needs are unique to each class
- Supporting teachers in their efforts to improve literacy instruction by connecting them with people with experience and expertise
- Establishing a shared vision of improvement
- Encouraging team members to share their instructional strategies
- Assisting members of the team by suggesting strategies I have read about in the literature and also selecting and suggesting readings and encouraging teachers to discover other instructional strategies in the literature
- Guiding the team in brainstorming and prioritizing instructional improvements
- Providing the team with a method of assessing the accessibility of reading materials
- Establishing a common focus to bring the group together
- Supporting the members of team as we gradually relinquish responsibility and members begin to work independently
- Sequencing tasks, simple to complex
- Encouraging varied approaches while maintaining a common team focus
- Developing a culture of support in which other members of the team feel confident in making suggestions to guide the team's efforts
- Creating a data driven system to measure improvement

New Leadership Learning:

- Maintaining a balance between guiding and supporting team members while encouraging them to experiment with instructional changes

Leadership skills which I needed to develop:

- Testing the members of a team by asking them to look for alternate explanations
- Encouraging and supporting teachers to continue with their efforts when they have decided to abandon their efforts to make instructional improvements
- Probing members of the team for clarification and precision
- Assuring that the team members prepare research questions that are clear and unambiguous

APPENDIX C: The Concerns Based Adoption Model

Category	Stage	Label	Expressions of Concern
Awareness	0	Awareness	I am not concerned about it (the innovation).
Self	1	Informational	I would like to know more about it.
	2	Personal	How will using it affect me?
Task	3	Management	I seem to be spending all my time getting material ready.
Impact	4	Consequence	How is my use affecting kids?
	5	Collaboration	I am concerned about relating what I am doing with what other instructors are doing.
	6	Refocusing	I have some ideas about something that would work even better.

(Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987, p. 37).