

The JK-Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Strategies Project: The View from the CODE Team

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"The skinny is that nothing succeeds like collective capacity."
(Michael Fullan, Motion Leadership, 2010).

During the 2009–2010 school year, the Council of Directors of Education (CODE), with the financial assistance of the Special Education Policy and Programs Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Education, supported regional studies of the development and implementation of effective, evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for all students in Junior Kindergarten through Grade 1.

This JK–Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Strategies project built on the lessons learned from the previous CODE Special Education Project 2005–2009. It provided support to ensure that the knowledge gained during the past four school years continues to generate improved learning for both students and staff in Ontario schools.

The project was designed to identify existing effective, evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies; share these through leadership networks; build teacher/school board capacity to implement them; and develop a monitoring tool to support school boards in the implementation process.

The Ministry/CODE Liaison Committee identified the following student, parent, and system outcomes for the CODE JK–Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Strategies Project.

Outcomes for students:

- improved student achievement
- increased student engagement
- early identification and intervention for students that need additional time and support

Outcomes for parents:

- increased opportunity for parent engagement
- increased parent confidence in public education

Outcomes for the system:

- increased capacity to implement effective classroom/school evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students in JK–Grade 1
- improved board capacity to self-assess the implementation of evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students in JK–Grade 1
- enhanced knowledge sharing among boards on effective, evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students in JK–Grade 1

With the assistance of a steering team, a process was designed to support the development of a provincial overview of assessment and intervention strategies which reflects the experience and expertise of Ontario educators.

A lead board for each of the seven regions was chosen in October 2009. The following lead boards were selected: York Region District School Board – Barrie Region; Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board – London Region; Sudbury Catholic District School Board – North Bay/Sudbury Region; Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board – Ottawa Region; Lakehead District School Board – Thunder Bay Region; Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board – Toronto and Area Region; and CSDC des Grandes Rivières, representing Ontario's French Language School Boards. The lead boards were responsible for assembling a working group from all boards in the same region of the province and scheduling regional team meetings.

To initiate the CODE Special Education Project: JK–Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Strategies, CODE team leaders and lead superintendents for each region made presentations at Regional Special Education Council meetings. Every region in the province then made plans to support the project focus on joint work at the regional level by finding ways to engage all boards in dialogue and reflection on current practice.

These regional professional learning communities reflected upon two key questions:

1. What is important to all of us in this region in relation to JK–Grade 1 assessment and intervention?
2. What will we focus on in developing our suggestions for the JK–Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Framework for the Province?

Boards collected data in response to reflective questions about the five elements in the "Collection of Evidence Template for Lead Boards." These five elements can be found in Appendix A of our report located on the CODE website. This framework was aligned with Ministry goals and with "lessons learned" at the district and school levels during the CODE Special Education Project (2005–2009). The template was intended to support the development of a provincial framework.

Over the course of the school year, the three CODE team leaders participated in regional meetings and/or teleconferences and provided lead superintendents with ongoing support and monitoring for the project. Each region was required to prepare a final submission for the project team of CODE/lead board members focused on effective, evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students in JK–Grade 1. These reports were presented at a provincial meeting attended by lead board superintendents, two additional staff members from each region, and staff from the Ministry's Special Education Policy and Programs Branch. The CODE team then developed an assessment and

intervention framework for use across the province by synthesizing effective strategies and practices identified in the regional reports. This was all drawn together to make up the elements of the CODE Final Report.

The Final Report, the Evaluation Report and an interactive Framework document will be available on the Code website in mid-October. You are encouraged to visit the CODE website, www.ontariodirectors.org, to view and participate in this exciting initiative.

In closing, we would like to thank the staff of the Ministry of Education Special Education Policy and Programs Branch and the school board staff from across the province that participated and informed us of the creative and effective strategies as reported in the CODE JK–Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Framework. We acknowledge that this project would not have been possible without the leadership of our lead boards along with the skill and talent of the many people who have contributed their expertise. CODE is acutely aware that the work is not finished, but that through the concerted efforts of board staff, the conversation and knowledge mobilization under way will enhance our understanding of this very important endeavour. We thank all of those involved for allowing us the opportunity to work together. ●

✉ Comments about this article? Email [John Fauteux](mailto:John.Fauteux@ed.gov.on.ca) or [Michelle Forge](mailto:Michelle.Forge@ed.gov.on.ca)

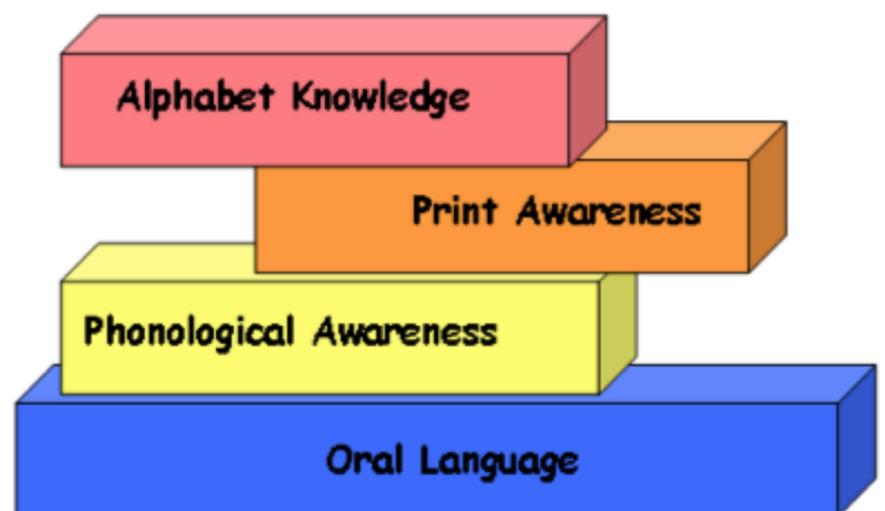
Barrie Region Tackles the Assessment of the Four Cornerstones of Early Literacy Development

Louise Moreau, Superintendent, York Region District School Board

For the CODE JK–Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Strategies Project (2009–2010), the Barrie Region boards agreed to work collaboratively to:

- provide leadership and coordination to identify existing effective, evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students in JK–Grade 1 across the Barrie boards;
- determine the area(s) for collective focus;
- investigate extending the work of ACE-ACT group who are currently working collectively (11 Barrie Region boards) on areas of language development with evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students not yet working on JK–Grade 1 curriculum; and
- coordinate and provide to CODE a Barrie Region synopsis of evidence-informed practices to inform a provincial synthesis.

A committee of people representing school boards across the Barrie Region reviewed and gave collective thought to the evidence-informed assessment and intervention practices used within their respective boards. Amongst the committee members, it was agreed that literacy would be the collective focus for the 2009–2010 project.



Reviews of current research indicated that four essential evidence based predictors of success in early literacy development include alphabet knowledge, print awareness, phonological awareness, and oral language (Trehearne 2005). For the purposes of this project, the Barrie board committee reached consensus that these four cornerstones would frame their work together.

Four Cornerstones of Literacy Success

The work of the Barrie Region was based on the understanding that reading and writing are complex processes that require the student to take advantage of a variety of language cues to make sense of the printed word. Therefore, it is important that classrooms provide multiple assessment and instructional opportunities to support the development of alphabet knowledge, print awareness, phonological awareness, and oral language. Classroom activities that intentionally promote a balance of these four cornerstones are needed to support the literacy success of all learners.

Assessment and the Tiered Approach to Intervention

Using a tiered approach (Learning for All, 2009, pp. 23–24; Education For All, 2005, p. 120) to literacy instruction across the four cornerstones provides a mechanism for the infusion of practices that are responsive to the strengths and needs of all learners. Integral to this process is the building of teacher capacity to think about and embed sound assessment and instructional practices to address the personal learning strengths and needs

« Barrie Region, continued

of each student, including those who are most vulnerable. The ability to mindfully plan for instructional practices that are matched to the individual learning styles of children requires us to reflect on the instructional starting points for all learners. "Frequent and accurate assessment, evaluation, and progress monitoring by the classroom teacher comprise the engine that drives change in instruction to meet the needs of all students" (Lyon, Fletcher, Fuchs, & Chhabra, in *Education for All*, 2005, p. 60). Although necessary, assessment is not sufficient on its own. By aligning and adjusting strategies and resources according to assessment results, instructional approaches become sustainable, effective, and differentiated (Learning for All, 2009, p. 19).

Armed with these shared beliefs and understandings, the Barrie Region CODE group compiled a range of assessment tools that support the four cornerstones of early literacy and guide our instruction to meet the needs of each learner. Tools were captured to reflect emergent literacy skills for both commercially developed and locally developed assessments, including many locally developed or adapted assessment tools. Through facilitated discussions, it was determined that school boards use a "tiered approach" to make sure that appropriate strategies, supports, and interventions are identified and implemented to ensure student success. Within the tiered approach, the importance of a multidisciplinary team was considered vital to providing collaborative opportunities around student observation, data collection, strategies, and interventions.

In all school boards and within the collaborative group, it was decided that when staff engaged in professional learning opportunities in the area of assessment, conversations about the assessment process and capacity building among staff were considered most valuable. Effective program delivery occurred when diagnostic and formative assessment data were correctly interpreted, shared, and used to make decisions about instructional starting points and intervention. Results from assessment tools provided information for the student and teacher to inform and modify the teaching and learning critical pathway.

The compilation of assessment tools along with the strategies and interventions that were discussed was shared among all of the boards. Given the limited amount of time allocated for the project, it was agreed that the discussion has only just begun and that there continues to be a considerable amount of sharing of best practices to be done. To quote one participant, "I'm trying to figure out how we can continue to support this kind of work. This collaboration is so important. Historically, the CODE projects have only been about the work in one district. This year, we had the opportunity to collaborate and think at a regional level and that has allowed so much growth." Another participant stated that, "We need to create sustainability of the collaboration and communication between boards. The richness of conversation is invaluable and the connections that we have made outside of the project work need to continue." ●



References

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Trehearne, M. P., Hemming Healy, L., & Cantalini-Williams, M. (2005). *Comprehensive literacy resource for preschool teachers*. Vernon Hills, IL: ETA Cuisenaire.

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Une approche gagnante: la concertation des conseils scolaires dans un projet!

Liliane Laforest, CODE Team Member

Comment décrire le succès du projet des pratiques d'évaluation et d'intervention maternelle-1re année si ce n'est de reconnaître la grande valeur et les résultats tangibles des échanges professionnels entretenus par le personnel des conseils scolaires francophones. Le processus établi, par les sept surintendants de conseils scolaires, les représentants du Ministère et l'équipe de leadership du CODE, a privilégié une démarche réflexive parmi des surintendants, des directions de services et d'école, des conseillers pédagogiques et des enseignants tant aux niveaux provincial, qu'au régional et au local. Ils ont mobilisé leurs connaissances en portant un regard critique sur leurs pratiques d'évaluation et d'intervention et sur la mise en œuvre au niveau du conseil, de l'école et de la salle de classe.

CODE a privilégié un processus qui a suscité l'engagement des conseils en reconnaissant le leadership du surintendant, comme personne-clé, pour mener les discussions à tous les niveaux de son conseil, mais aussi pour profiter d'un échange professionnel avec ses pairs des autres conseils. C'est ainsi qu'ils ont pu entretenir un dialogue efficace entre plusieurs groupes de personnes pour recueillir de multiples informations sur les approches, les pratiques et les ressources dans la majorité des conseils en province.

Les résultats, de cette cueillette d'information et des discussions, se traduisent en un cadre conceptuel provincial de monitoring qui permet d'évaluer les stratégies d'évaluation et d'intervention ainsi que le processus de mise en œuvre au niveau du conseil. Le personnel des conseils a partagé de nombreuses pratiques efficaces, avec preuves à l'appui qui démontrent comment les pratiques d'enseignement contribuent à améliorer le rendement des élèves.

Depuis plus de vingt ans, les conseils de langue française ont mis en place des programmes de maternelle et de jardin d'enfants. Chaque conseil établit ses politiques, sa gestion et ses programmes développés par des équipes d'enseignants ayant une vaste expérience. Afin d'assurer une haute qualité de programmes et de services dans le conseil, une évaluation continue permet de connaître les points forts ainsi que les améliorations à apporter. Peu d'outils sont disponibles pour faire une évaluation aussi complète selon le processus d'une communauté d'apprentissage professionnelle. Les rencontres professionnelles ont suscité des discussions ouvertes sur la valeur et l'efficacité des outils, des stratégies et des pratiques utilisés. Plusieurs éléments et indicateurs qui peuvent servir à l'élaboration d'un plan d'amélioration de l'école et du conseil, ont été retenus comme étant pertinents. Tous les renseignements compilés par les conseils francophones participants ont servi à l'élaboration de cet outil. Les conseils pourront s'en servir pour réfléchir à leurs pratiques et les évaluer en plus d'acquérir des informations sur diverses approches et des ressources.



De nombreuses réalisations clés sont partagées dans un rapport provincial, accessible au site web du CODE. Il rapporte les retombées favorables sur plusieurs aspects tels la croissance professionnelle des participants, le rapprochement des responsables des secteurs de la programmation et de l'enfance en difficulté pour travailler vers un même objectif tant au niveau du conseil qu'au niveau régional et provincial. Une banque de ressources permet aussi aux conseils d'aller puiser des outils et des programmes qui peuvent les aider. Lors de la rencontre provinciale, des constats importants furent relevés selon les cinq éléments étudiés et un besoin de poursuivre ce dialogue dans un forum de communauté d'apprentissage provincial est proposé. Parmi les leçons apprises, nous reconnaissons l'importance d'utiliser un processus et un outil qui permettent tant de reconnaître les points forts de nos pratiques en identifiant ce qui nécessite des améliorations. L'engagement de toutes les personnes qui cherchent à rehausser l'enseignement est primordial dans une telle approche.

Le travail, réalisé grâce à l'implication d'un très grand nombre de personnes dans plusieurs conseils, a eu des retombées dans chacun des conseils, mais aussi tous les conseils francophones de la province peuvent en bénéficier. Mettre les connaissances de chacun à profit de tous est une formule gagnante! ●

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Regional Special Education Council (RSEC)–London Regional Office JK–Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Strategies Project

Vicki Corcoran, Superintendent, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board

Overview/Context:

The Regional Special Education Council from the school boards and school authorities in the London region has a history of working collaboratively to share resources, expertise, and data. Through a logic model exercise conducted in 2007 with facilitation from Ministry of Education personnel, the London Regional Special Education Council

To enable students with special needs to achieve their full potential through the provision of special education programs and services.

established the following goal:

The participating boards and school authorities have shared resources, information, and expertise as part of that professional learning opportunity, and have developed tools for the sharing of information and the gathering of regional data as we work towards this regional goal. As one aspect of this, the region has for the past several years used a web-based survey tool to gather regional data on assessments and Individual Education Plan processes. The various participants have used the information to inform their own practice in their individual boards.

What We Did:

In 2009–10, several of the boards in the region took on Lead Board responsibilities for various projects, such as: JK–1 CODE Project; ASD – Phase 2 Connection Project; A4 – Assessing Achievement in Alternative Areas; and Learning for All K–12. At the November 2009 RSEC meeting, it was agreed that data would be collected and shared among all parties with regard to all of these projects, and that the data and information would be gathered using a similar format and with similar mechanisms. Each participant completed an agreed-upon set of questions specific to the particular project. In a follow-up to the collected data, a meeting with each of the boards was held to verify the information and to identify resources being developed that would be shared regionally.

In order to facilitate the collection of the data, a recently retired RSEC member was employed to collect and collate the data and to present updates and findings at the regional RSEC meetings.