

Our new style

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Curriculum update

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in cooperation with the Ontario Ministry of Education

Power Tools for Teachers

Unique software package makes unit planning faster, easier

"When I show teachers the resources they can access in this software, they're just amazed," says Rose Dodgson, an Instructional Leader with the Toronto District School Board. "I recall one teacher commenting that it's replaced 30 binders she no longer has to lug around."



Rose Dodgson

provides an extensive support library of tools and information.

Created with the input and advice of educators, the Planner helps elementary and secondary teachers work with Ontario's standards-based curriculum, and assists in the development, adaptation, sharing and management of lesson plans and instructional resources. The software enables the teacher to develop unit plans from the ground up, adapt existing plans, and organize units for the year. As well, the Planner's Rubric Maker allows teachers to design rubrics for any lesson using achievement charts, tasks from provincial exemplars, or their own text. And, as many have discovered,

the Planner represents a quantum leap forward, in comparison with traditional methods.

"It's not just a question of time-saving, although that is a real benefit," says Dodgson. "What's exciting to me is the fact that it walks you through the design-down process, and gives you all the resources you need every step of the way. Plus, you can share your work, or collaborate with other teachers. So it's a very powerful tool."

The Ontario Curriculum Unit Planner has been tested with elementary and secondary teachers across the province, through a number of preliminary versions. The official version was provided in January of this year to boards for use in schools. Teachers can also access a special unit planner website at www.ocup.org that provides a wealth of added resources – training materials, course profiles, and more than 250 sample units of study, which have been reviewed by the Ontario Curriculum Centre. Registration on the OCUP website also gives access to technical support.

"The software is user-friendly," says Dodgson. "It does take time to master, as with anything new, but it's an investment that's well worth it, when you consider the payoff in faster, easier and higher quality unit plans."

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The Planner is structured to help the teacher through each element of effective standards-based design, including:

- identification of expectations;
- development of assessment and evaluation strategies;
- identification of performance tasks and criteria;
- selection of teaching/learning strategies, and
- topic/theme and resource planning.

But as teachers soon discover, it's much more than just an automated version of the time-consuming 'pencil and paper' method. Need to adapt a unit for a special education or ESL student? You can access the information to do this in a couple of keystrokes. Want to seamlessly integrate curriculum expectations for a combined grade class? You can search for and combine expectations from multiple grades in a matter of seconds. Need to develop a unit collaboratively with a colleague in another school – or another city? Just use the built-in online facilities, and share your work instantly as an email attachment.

Cec Knight, Educational Services Advisor with the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board, agrees that the Planner can be a highly valuable tool that serves the needs of teachers in

both the elementary and secondary panels.

"The Teacher Companions alone make this a very powerful tool," says Knight, referring to the software's built-in resource library. "Having one-stop shopping access to 160 teaching strategies and dozens of special education resources is terrific."



Cec Knight

The resource library is accessible from anywhere within the program, and includes all of the Ontario curriculum expectations for K-12, along with a series of Teaching Companions, which provide comprehensive information on:

- teaching and learning strategies;
- assessment and recording strategies;
- special education;
- ESL/ELD, and
- curriculum terms and definitions.

The resource library also includes a comprehensive listing of some 300 educational licensed software titles that have been made available by the ministry for use by all boards and schools in Ontario.

The Ontario Curriculum Unit Planner was carefully designed to meet the needs of both novice and experienced users. In fact, it offers the user three different

Point of View

Our readers write

Do you have comments or suggestions? Please let us know. We'll publish selected comments in future issues. Write or email us at the address on the front page of this issue.

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environments to work in, from a very simple, quick outline format to a sophisticated development environment. All three levels enable the user to develop finished unit plans. The software also includes templates and reference materials which can be printed and used as an aid while developing unit plans.

Says Knight, "we have used the Planner with secondary writing teams to develop units for both the Grade 11 and 12 board consortium course profile projects, and as a support for elementary teachers who want access to the body of work created by others. From one end of the spectrum to the other, it is a highly effective tool."

The Planner has been designed to facilitate collaboration. With an email connection, users can share their work and develop units of study as part of a team. For example, teachers can develop collaboratively the basic framework for a given unit and then work individually on selected sub-tasks within the unit.

According to Knight, the Ontario Curriculum Unit Planner is an indispensable tool to make the most of planning time. "Teachers have thanked us for making this tool available, and that's the best indication of the value of the Planner. I would encourage every teacher to discover what a difference it can truly make in their preparation for the classroom." •

How to get started

Software and training

Five copies of the Ontario Curriculum Unit Planner software were provided to every school in January 2003, through each board's Ontario Educational Software Services (O.E.S.S.) representative. If you don't have the software in your school, just ask your principal when it is scheduled to be available. The software licensing agreement allows teachers registered with the Ontario College of Teachers, and working in a publicly funded school in Ontario, to install this software on their home computers if they wish, giving access both at home and school.

A number of additional training resources are also available to help you learn and use the software, and provide you with ongoing support:

- software tutorials in PDF format are available on the Ontario Curriculum Unit Planner website at www.ocup.org, and can provide a good overview of the software;
- an extensive help system and documentation are built into the product, which provides detailed assistance at each stage of the unit planning process, and
- when you register at www.ocup.org you will get access to technical support. Registration will also give you access to updates and new features.

Win the Planner for home use!*

To be one of 20 winners, just answer these four simple questions:

1. The official version of the Ontario Curriculum Unit Planner was distributed to boards in:

- ☐ September 2002
- ☐ January 2003
- ☐ 1997

2. The Planner includes information resources on:

- ☐ ESL / ELD
- ☐ Special Education
- ☐ assessment
- ☐ all of the above

3. The Planner enables teachers to:

- ☐ develop unit plans
- ☐ adapt existing unit plans
- ☐ manage and track lesson plans
- ☐ share unit plans
- ☐ all of the above

4. The licencing agreement for the Ontario Curriculum Unit Planner allows teachers in publicly funded schools in Ontario to use the software:

- ☐ at school
- ☐ at home
- ☐ both

Send your entry, with the name of your school and board, to the address on the front page. Contest entries must be received no later than May 9th, 2003.

*Prize winners must be registered with the Ontario College of Teachers and employed in a publicly funded school in Ontario.



Math Report points the way

by Dr. Christine Suurtamm, Co-Chair, Expert Panel on Early Math,
Assistant Professor, University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education

The Expert Panel on Early Math report, released by the Ministry of Education in February, 2003, presents a vision for Kindergarten to Grade 3 math education that will positively influence the teaching and learning of mathematics across the province.

The members of the Expert Panel on Early Math, experts recognized throughout Ontario for their experience and expertise in the teaching and learning of mathematics in the early grades, had a variety of perspectives and experiences. They came together to create a common vision, whether French or English language educator or consultant, classroom teacher, researcher, principal, or university math professor.

The panel's work was focused on the belief that teachers' understanding of the mathematics they teach, understanding of the ways to teach it, and application of these understandings in the classroom have the most impact on student learning.

Because the early grades of schooling are an important period of educational growth, positive, successful experiences with mathematics during this time are crucial. All students can learn significant mathematics if their learning environments encourage and support mathematics, and if the instructional and assessment strategies they encounter in the learning environment promote sound mathematics learning. The report discusses the elements of an encouraging learning environment for mathematics in the early grades; providing a balanced program for effective mathematics instruction and assessment; and promoting and sustaining teacher expertise in teaching.

A positive learning environment sets the stage for mathematical learning.

Teachers must consider a variety of factors when building an effective learning environment:

- building a community of young mathematicians in every classroom is essential;
- learning mathematics through doing, talking, and reflecting is successful and is supported by research;
- everyone can do mathematics;
- positive attitudes towards mathematics should be promoted and displayed;
- children's intuitive and prior knowledge of mathematics should be valued and built upon;
- children should feel comfortable to take risks when trying to solve problems;
- mathematics learning should be a community effort, involving students, teachers, parents, and administrators, and
- the developmental aspects of learning should be considered.

An effective mathematics program should be built on several premises. Learning should be structured around important mathematical concepts that represent clusters of curriculum expectations. Children make sense of mathematics through solving problems and should be provided with problem solving experiences that focus on developing an understanding of mathematics. Students also need opportunities to practice skills. Successful teaching designs "developmentally appropriate" tasks and activities – challenging but attainable, flexible to respond to individual variation in approaching the task, and consistent with children's ways of thinking and learning.

What is Ontario's Early Math Strategy?

Introduced in 2002, the Early Math Strategy is a province-wide initiative designed to help improve the math skills of young students, and the techniques used to teach math. Like the Early Reading Strategy introduced a year earlier, the Early Math Strategy requires the setting of targets to improve student achievement, and provides teachers and students with various resources aimed at achieving those goals.

Included within the strategy are:

- intensive lead teacher training based on the research-validated methods described in the Expert Panel report. The training program for approximately 4000 lead math teachers begins this spring and continues through to the next school year;
- a technical guide on effective instruction, provided to all elementary teachers K-3, which takes what the Panel Report describes as model practices and shows teachers how to incorporate them into classroom instruction. This is the foundation document for the training program, and
- web-based learning modules to showcase live case studies of concrete problem areas of math learning, combined with the application of effective math teaching practices. Accessible by all elementary teachers, these resources will complement the lead-teacher training and technical guide.

Children learn by doing, talking, and reflecting and, as such, assessment of students' understanding of mathematics in the early grades should recognize observation as an important assessment strategy. There should be dedicated time for mathematics for all students in Kindergarten through Grade 3 as well as discussion of mathematics concepts throughout the day when appropriate.

Students need opportunities for a variety of experiences in mathematics so that conceptual understanding, problem solving approaches, and mathematical skills are developed. The report emphasizes the importance of balance in an effective program and suggests a balanced variety of:

- teaching strategies: play, exploration, investigation, direct instruction, and practice in a stimulating environment.
- assessment strategies: identifying the quality of both processes and products of students' math learning, using assessment to make judgments about both learning and teaching, and providing immediate feedback to learners and teachers while learning is still in formative stages.
- student groupings: shared, guided, and independent.

- types of activities: to accommodate individual learning for students.
- time: to practice and consolidate skills, and time to apply skills in solving problems.

WHERE CAN I GET THE REPORT?

Copies of the report have been distributed to public schools across the province, in quantities sufficient for every Kindergarten to Grade 3 teacher. Additional copies are available free of charge by calling the ministry's toll-free information line at 1-800-387-5514.

The role of the teacher in early mathematics is essential. Thus, developing and sustaining teacher expertise is of major interest. The following considerations need to be made when developing, implementing, and sustaining professional growth of teachers and administrators:

- it is important that elementary teachers learn new teaching strategies but equally important that they become more comfortable with the mathematics content that they teach;
- when teachers become more comfortable with mathematics, confidence is enhanced and demonstrated in the classroom;

- professional development should be connected to the school focus and needs but also should be informed by a system-wide vision;
- teachers should be supported with sufficient time and resources to try out new learning and to reflect on it;
- networking and collaboration of teachers during the implementation of new strategies is essential for collegial support;
- teachers need the support of elementary consultants with knowledge of mathematics content and appropriate instructional and assessment strategies, and
- principals and superintendents also need to know and experience what good mathematics learning and teaching looks like.

The report makes several suggestions regarding the implementation process of the Early Math Strategy. During the implementation phase of the strategy, there should be feedback and monitoring processes in place so that adjustments to the implementation can be made as it proceeds. Implementation of the Early Math Strategy should be monitored in many ways, not only through the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) scores but also through research on classroom practice. A lead

teacher in every school will be participating in professional development, implementing new strategies, and investigating their own classroom practice. These teachers should be given time to assimilate their new understanding since new ideas take time to be internalized and implemented.

Early mathematics is an important area of focus and lays a foundation for mathematical understanding and attitudes about mathematics. The report presents a vision of sound early mathematics education and should create a dialogue about the importance of early math education and about how children learn mathematics.

It will inform educators and parents about the characteristics of sound mathematical experiences and learning. It helps to support classroom teachers and recommends appropriate resources and strategies for teachers and students for teaching and learning mathematics.

The important role of the whole community in math education, including the parent's role is highlighted. Through the report and implementation of the Early Math Strategy, positive attitudes and beliefs towards mathematics are promoted. And ultimately, the report and implementation of the Early Math Strategy will permit more students to be successful in mathematics.

By providing children with the necessary conditions for the successful learning of mathematics, we can nurture strong mathematics learners who approach mathematics with confidence and competence and continue to use and promote mathematics in today's society. •

Early Math Parent Guide

Supporting parents to be active partners

Research demonstrates that children do better when their parents are actively involved in their education.

Helping your child learn math: A Parent's Guide suggests simple activities to help parents explore math with their child, from Junior Kindergarten through Grade 3.

A similar guide which is focused on reading is also available.

Copies of these guides have been distributed to all school boards. You can obtain additional free copies by calling the ministry's toll-free information line at 1-800-387-5514.



The Expert Panel on Early Math Members

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Be Heard

Tell us what topics you would like to know more about. Mail your responses to the address on the front page, or respond online at www.curriculum-update.info.

Ontario Secondary School
Certificate ☐

Elementary Units of Study ☐

Early Reading Strategy ☐

Early Math Strategy ☐

Performance Appraisal for
Teachers ☐

Schools that Need Extra Help ☐

IEP Standards ☐

Sustaining Quality Curriculum ☐

Passport to Prosperity ☐

Skills Passport ☐

Locally Developed Compulsory
Courses ☐

Ontario Youth Apprenticeship
Program ☐

School to work Transition ☐

Other topics ☐

Why Boys? Why Now?



by Bev Freedman
former Superintendent
of Programs
Durham District
School Board

Educational change across North America, Britain and Australia has been focused on school improvement and improving student achievement. One concern that has emerged is the underachievement of boys in comparison to girls in reading and writing. Bev Freedman talks about gender achievement and the Durham board's approach to addressing this issue.

Historically, work in the realm of gender differences in achievement has focused almost exclusively on girls. Today, as we see girls closing the achievement gap, the focus has begun to shift to boys, particularly in the area of literacy.

"...NLSCY reported similar findings across the country..."

The gendered results of boys in reading and writing can be seen in the achievement results of the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) administered by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). In 2002, on the Grade 10 test, 55% of boys passed reading and writing, compared

to 70% of girls. In the Durham District School Board, 67% of boys and 79% of the girls passed both.

EQAO also reported a gendered differential in attitude towards reading and writing in elementary school. In Grade 3, 80% of girls and 72% of boys indicated that they like to read and the comparable data in Grade 6 is 68% of girls and 52% of boys. In Grade 3 writing, 69% of girls and only 54% of boys indicated that they liked to write. In Grade 6, 56% of girls and 38% of boys indicated that they like to write. The Canadian National Longitudinal Study on Children and Youth (NLSCY) reported similar findings across the country, as did the international results from PISA 2000.

This attitudinal difference along gender lines is corroborated in Durham by data gleaned from student attitudinal surveys and student focus groups, conducted from 1998 to 2000.

Gendered differences in test results require thoughtful responses from school boards. Additional research is required. Which boys are having difficulty and what are the likely sources of the trouble? The issue may be developmental or tied to learning styles. It may be that reading and writing are seen as 'soft' subjects, not for 'real boys', unlike mathematics and science. It may be that modalities used to teach boys to read and write don't appear to engage their interest.

Educators need to look critically at the areas in which boys and girls may not be well served by the school system. The solution is not as simple as taking resources away from girls. Nor should educators gear the curriculum more towards a male-centered learning environment, to the exclusion of girls. Care needs to be taken to balance the needs of boys and the needs of girls.

The Durham District School Board has approximately 70,000 students in 120 schools. Although Durham students have generally performed well on the provincial assessments, gendered results continue to exist. As the former superintendent responsible for programs, and with trustee support, I like many administrators and teachers was curious as to the perspectives of our male students on this issue.

"We use the Oshawa Generals hockey team as advocates..."

In focus groups, we discovered that many of the books used in classrooms were not engaging the boys. Through the dedicated work of teacher-librarians we began to gather high interest reading resources for boys including informational text, magazines, science fiction and action fiction. Some schools encourage student input in book selection for whole class literacy assignments. Others have piloted reading clubs for boys, so that they become

Resources on Gender Achievement

While literature on the gender gap has focused for many years on girls' achievement, there is a new and rapidly growing library of material focused on boys, and a growing interest in the subject. Here is a small sampling of materials for educators recommended by Bev:

A Habit of Healthy Idleness: Boys' Underachievement in Historical Perspective Cohen, M., Open University Press.

Failing Boys? Issues in Gender and Achievement

Epstein, D., Elwood, V. Hey, & J. Maw, Open University Press.

Boys' Underachievement, Special Needs Practices and Questions of Equity Hey, V., D. Leonard, H. Daniels & M. Smith, Open University Press.

Raising Cain Kindlin, D. & Thompson, M., Ballantine Books.

Gender Issues in the Teaching of English

Mellin McCracken, N. & Appleby, eds., Boynton/Cook Publishers Inc.

The Jossey-Bass Reader on Gender in Education

Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Relating Attitudes, Gender and Student Achievement in Grades 3 & 6 EQAO Research Series, Number 1, April 1999. Queen's Printer.

more aware of books that would hold their interest.

The board also began to look at new approaches to teaching pre-reading and pre-writing skills. A multiple intelligence framework of teaching pre-reading and writing skills in Kindergarten through Grade 1, entitled Animated Literacy, is being implemented. The speech and language pathologists introduced this approach from California, and our Early Literacy Resource teachers (ELRTs) play a key role in its implementation.

Some teachers are looking at giving boys more frequent breaks and more hands-on activities to sustain their interest. We also seek out males as good role models for reading since the information gathered in our focus groups concluded that a component to success for interested male readers was having an older brother or father who enjoyed reading.

We use the Oshawa Generals hockey team as advocates for literacy. We invite dads and community members into the schools. We are encouraging more role-playing and simulations as a way to get at "feelings". Educator/authors David Booth and David Bouchard have modelled best practices for our teachers, administrators, and parents. We encourage business and the skilled trades, in our co-op and Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) sessions, to share with students the importance of literacy to help make it 'real' for boys.

Technology appeals to boys. Boys like to read material on the internet and memorize detailed material about games. On our attitudinal surveys they exhibit a greater confidence in their computer skills. We utilize computer-assisted learning in our primary classrooms. We have made gender a topic in staff conversations.

For Durham, the issue is to pay attention to improving reading and writing skills for boys, but not at the expense of girls. We have different gendered interventions for girls including Scientists in the Schools, pilot all girls math and science classes, and mini-conferences for Grade 8 girls in partnership with the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO). That however, is another story for another time.

We are not alone. Other boards such as York Catholic, Avon Maitland and the Toronto District, are exploring a variety of gendered strategies. What can you as a teacher or administrator do?

First, become familiar with the data. In your class or school, what is the data indicating regarding gendered achievement? Use informational text. Ask the boys what they would like to read. Make it relevant and interesting. Use strategies such as role-play to engage interest and make "how do you feel" activities safe. Play to their strengths. Use graphic organizers to facilitate expression, and use 'real-world' simulations to engage them in the material.

*"...respond based on research
and good practice..."*

Keep in mind that the differences among boys and among girls are greater than the differences between boys and girls. This is not about all boys or all girls.

Varied instruction and resource choice are good for both. All students need inviting and engaging materials. You need to be aware of what the data is indicating, and then respond based on research and good practice.

It is important that all students succeed. We need to intervene when they don't, to ensure their continued success. That is why boys, why now. •

Short Takes

News for Ontario educators

Ontario selected to conduct OECD study

Ontario has been chosen by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) to assist in a major research study on the future of schooling. In particular, the study will look at the nature of schools and schooling, and schools' ability to meet the special demands of a rapidly changing technological and social landscape. The study is targeted for completion in early 2004.

Contact Cheryl Carson at
(416) 325-1088 or
cheryl.carson@edu.gov.on.ca.

Sustaining quality curriculum

5-year review cycle to keep curriculum current and relevant

Classroom teachers, principals, parents and students, school board staff, subject associations and subject experts will be invited to take part in a process to ensure that each discipline area in the curriculum is reviewed every 5 years, and revised if necessary.

The process, recently launched by the Ministry of Education, is designed to ensure that Ontario's curriculum keeps pace with change and continues to address the needs of students, while reflecting the latest research on learning, skills development and effective teaching strategies. Changes will be made to the curriculum only if the evidence demonstrates the need for revision.

To refine the process, a pilot was begun in February of 2003, focusing on one specific discipline area. Read the next edition of Curriculum Update for an overview of the schedule.

Upcoming...

Early Math Training

Training in effective instruction in Early Math, for teams from school boards from across the province, will be sponsored by the ministry in spring 2003. This intensive training is based on the research-validated methods recommended in the Early Math Panel Report. The board teams are expected in turn to provide training to a lead teacher in every school of the board beginning in the fall of 2003. A similar program of training is occurring in parallel for Early Reading.

Sustaining Quality Curriculum

Sessions will be held across the province in April with teachers, principals and board staff to provide input on sustaining the quality of Ontario's curriculum. Parents, students and community experts will also be invited to provide input.

Performance Appraisal Training

The ministry is sponsoring training for principals and vice-principals on the teacher performance appraisal system, focusing on best practices and effective management of the performance appraisal process. Provided through the Ontario Principals' Council (OPC), Catholic Principals Council of Ontario (CPCO) and Association des directions and directions adjointes franco-ontariennes (ADFO), the training began in January 2003, and will be completed in April.

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