OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

➠ To stimulate research-driven, “instructionally intelligent” practices in partnership with teacher candidates, thereby increasing the quality of their learning experiences

➠ To develop better congruency between course-work and practicum experiences for teacher candidates

➠ To provide associate teachers with a better understanding of the program so that they can collaborate with and mentor candidates more effectively

LEAD RESEARCHERS

John Mazurek and Lynn Lemieux

Enhancing Learning

INSTRUCTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

“Best Bets” for Improving Student Learning

Inservice #1:
Effective Lesson Planning and Framing of Questions
Madeline Hunter's (1976) Lesson Design format and “SKAMPI” organizer (see Bennett & Rolheiser, 2001) were used, and suggestions for framing of questions were taken from the work of Schwartz and Bone (1995) and Bennett and Rolheiser (2001). Marzano, Pickering and Pollack (2001) cite meta-analyses that indicate average learning gains of 22–23% for students whose teachers are skilled in these respects.

Inservice #2:
Classroom Management
This session focused on an overview of Bennett and Smilanich’s (1994) framework for preventing and responding to misbehaviour, and on an exploration of ways to support teacher candidates in implementing the framework during their practicum placements. We chose Bennett and Smilanich’s work because it promotes authoritative (as opposed to “coercive” or “laissez faire”) classroom management strategies, and focuses attention on building students’ intrinsic motivation.

Inservice #3:
Cooperative Learning
We devoted one session to this topic because it is one of the most widely researched of instructional processes and there is considerable evidence that it contributes to gains in student learning. For example, Marzano, Pickering and Pollack (2001) cite a meta-analysis that indicates average learning gains of 27% for students in classrooms where cooperative learning is used regularly compared to classrooms where it is not.

Inservice #4:
Backward Design
We chose to focus on Wiggins and McTighe's (1998) framework because its suggestions for organizing curriculum build on the work of Perkins (1992), Gardner (1991) and others with respect to best pedagogical practices for stimulating thinking and learning; it also parallels the findings of Stigler and Hiebert (1999), which are based on the 1997 TIMSS study of science and mathematics instruction and achievement around the world.

Implementation of the Project

All prospective associate teachers for the East Option were informed in June 2002 that their responsibilities would involve attendance at four after-school in-service sessions during the fall and winter of 2002–2003. Arrangements were made with Greig Black, principal of Ellesmere-Statton P.S. (TDSB), to host these events at his school.

In December 2002, after the first practicum, a survey was mailed to all associate teachers who had hosted a candidate and attended at least one of the fall meetings. A similar survey was issued to all associates who hosted a candidate in the second practicum and/or attended one or both of the winter in-services.

To corroborate the survey data, an East Option instructor arranged to visit five associate teachers’ classrooms. Each of these teachers was observed for one or two 30–40-minute lessons in January and/or May 2003. In addition, each teacher was interviewed for 15 minutes in May 2003, providing an opportunity to respond in depth. In May 2003, a separate survey was conducted with East Option teacher candidates.
Data Collected

ATTENDANCE:
- October 2: 53 of 58 associates (93%)
- October 16: 35 of 58 associates (60%)
- January 15: 27 of 57 associates (47%)
- January 22: 36 of 57 associates (63%)

ASSOCIATE TEACHER SURVEY RESPONSES:
- December: 36 of 58 associates (62%)
- May: 38 of 57 associates (67%)

TEACHER CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES:
- May: 35 of 57 candidates (61%)

Assessment of Impact
- Students in classrooms affiliated with the East Option received more exposure to powerful instructional methods during their practica than would have been the case had the project not been undertaken. As one teacher candidate remarked on her survey, “My associate allowed me to experiment with many of the techniques I learned in East Option.” The assignments submitted after the second practicum showed that almost all had had opportunities to apply cooperative learning and effective unit planning techniques (e.g., focusing a series of lessons around “big ideas” and clusters of Ministry expectations, selecting meaningful assessment tasks, etc.).
- Teacher candidates and associate teachers had a “common language” for discussing key instructional practices. One associate wrote, “It has been so important to be ‘on the same page’ with the program provided by East Option. It’s great to be able to use the same ‘labels’ as student teachers regarding instructional practices.” Another reported, “I was aware of what the teacher candidate was being taught at school and was therefore able to support her in the classroom.”
- Associate teachers felt valued as learners. As one commented, “Great learning opportunity to reflect on my own teaching practices! It was refreshing to revisit what I know but have put on the ‘backburner’ for quite a while—for example, cooperative learning. It joggs my memory to go back to the classroom and try it.” Several participants noted the importance of dinners that allowed them the opportunity to meet. Many expressed enthusiasm for having had opportunities to meet with colleagues from other schools at these dinners and in-services.
- More associate teachers affiliated with East Option are beginning to see their role as an opportunity to improve their own teaching. A number of the associates noted how the combination of the in-services and subsequent work with candidates had motivated them to initiate new practices: “I learned some new ideas and strategies from my teacher candidates. I see the importance of Tribes and cooperative learning a lot more now. I’m trying to stick more to work in twos and threes rather than larger groups.”
- Stronger links are developing between the East Option and our partner school boards with regard to professional development.

Next Steps
1. In collaboration with TDSB and other boards, explore methods to maintain an “awareness level” among all associate teachers of “instructionally intelligent” practices advocated by the East Option.
2. Provide two new “awareness” sessions for all associates on The Teaching/Learning Cycle Model—a framework for planning generative learning experiences.
3. Expand links between East Option, OISE/UT and TDSB in the area of professional development.
4. Continue to expand the number of associate teachers affiliated with the East Option who are committed to developing their “instructional intelligence.”

References

John Mazurek, right, and Lynn Lemieux are coordinators of the East Option of OISE/UT’s Elementary Pre-service Program.