

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

May 21, 2002

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: District Literacy Programs

ORIGINATOR: M. de Man, Department Head

RESOURCE

STAFF: Carolyn Hunter, Sandy Forster, Danielle Moore, Betty Tams, Stuart Wachowicz, Mary Winton

INFORMATION

This report is brought forward in response to questions raised about the nature of the literacy approaches presently in use in Edmonton Public Schools.

Background and Rationale:

Over the past few years the district has moved to encourage systematic and structured approaches for the teaching of literacy skills to students (Appendix I). A number of different strategies are in use and in the hands of skilled and dedicated teachers they achieve good results. Each program has developed a solid structured approach and significant teacher expertise.

In the course of the last four to five years many district teachers have expressed particular interest in two approaches, **Balanced Literacy** and **Literacy M.A.P.** (Meaningful Applied Phonics formerly Writing Road to Reading). Both are very deliberate and well planned approaches, which have resulted in significant gains in district achievement over the past four to five years, as shown in achievement tests, HLATS and preliminary results in the AISI project (Appendix II and III). The district has been making faster gains in literacy related areas than any other urban jurisdiction.

While **Balanced Literacy** (Appendix IV) and **Literacy M.A.P.** (Appendix V) are not the only literacy approaches used in the district, they are both researched based approaches which are meeting the needs of students and are leading to improved student achievement. They are by no means the only successful strategies in use but they are the largest. **Balanced Literacy** is used currently in 86 elementary schools, with **Literacy M.A.P.** being used in about 20. **Literacy M.A.P.** is also being modified to assist division III students experiencing reading difficulties and will also be used to enhance literacy in Aboriginal programs. **Reading Recovery** is an additional strategy for addressing the needs of very young students who are not yet reading at grade level. It is geared to assisting students who are behind in division I. **Strategies to Achieve Reading Success** is a newer and similar program used by a number of junior high teachers to enhance the reading skills of students who are reading at a level lower than grade level. These programs have been very successful to date. While the

two strategies **Balanced Literacy** and **Literacy M.A.P.** differ in some ways, they do have some strong common principles of practice:

- teachers activate and use students' prior knowledge to support reading comprehension
- students have many opportunities to read in class
- students are engaged in authentic, meaning-making literacy experiences: for pleasure, to be informed and to perform a task
- high quality literature is emphasized and multiple texts that link and expand concepts are used
- students receive direct explicit instruction in decoding and comprehension strategies that promote independent reading
- students receive instruction in phonics
- decoding and fluency skills are taught (includes instruction of phonemes, sight words, explicitly taught vocabulary, and how to apply skills to reading). A comprehensive word study/phonics program is integrated into reading/writing instruction
- comprehension strategies are taught (for example, reading for a purpose, active reading, predicting, imagery, self-questioning, monitoring, seeking clarification, summarization)
- there is a balance of direct instruction, guided instruction and independent practice
- a variety of assessment techniques are used to inform instruction

Existing differences are not in terms of end result but rather in terms of approach. There are difference in the amount of coaching and mentorship as well as in the sequencing of skills and in classroom organization and delivery.

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Appendix I: A Framework for Literacy Instruction

Appendix II: Grade 3 Achievement Test Results

Appendix III: Grade 3 HLAT Results

Appendix IV: Background in **Literacy M.A.P.**

Appendix V: Background in **Balanced Literacy**

A FRAMEWORK FOR LITERACY INSTRUCTION

Literacy is the ability to read and use written information and to write appropriately, in a range of contexts. It includes the recognition of number and basic mathematical signs and symbols within texts. Literacy is used to develop knowledge and understanding, to achieve personal growth, and to function effectively in our society. There are many contextual variables that make a difference in literacy learning. Becoming literate involves basic skills and strategies, critical thinking, the ability to find meaning, and to apply what is read or written in the real world, under different circumstances, and with many different types of text.

Considerable educational research has been conducted over the past forty years, and a great deal is known about the complexities of literacy and literacy instruction. The cumulative research has increased our understanding of how students develop in their ability to read and write effectively. Edmonton Public Schools supports literacy instruction within a framework that addresses the requirements of the language arts curriculum and is based upon the following principles of research-based practices.

1. Learning is meaning making. Students are taught to actively search for, and construct new meanings as they read and write.
2. Prior knowledge guides learning. Teachers determine students' current level of understanding and then teach new ideas, skills and strategies at an appropriate level of challenge.
3. Instructional strategies are based upon a balance of both form (phonics, mechanics, grammar) and function (comprehension, purpose, meaning) of literacy processes.
4. To develop high-level strategic readers and writers, the teacher promotes high-level thinking and strategic versatile reading. Students use word recognition and comprehension strategies to engender meaning-making. They explore a wide range of literature, such as different genres and information texts, and provides opportunities for research and the use of technology.
5. The teacher guides students, models strategic literacy behaviours and processes, provides support, and introduces students to books, stories and informational texts that are worth reading.
6. Scaffolded instruction facilitates learning. With concentrated instructional support, students learn important skills and strategies, then gradually assume more responsibility to independently apply what they have learned.
7. A literacy focused, book-rich learning environment promotes student interest and involvement. The teacher visibly values and models a love of reading, and promotes student interaction about literacy.

8. A successful literacy program rests upon informed decision making by the teacher. The teacher employs literacy components and instructional strategies with the right amount of emphasis to meet the needs of the group of students and individual students.

Cantrell, S.C. (1999). Effective teaching and literacy learning: A look inside primary classrooms. Reading Teacher, 52(4), 370-379.

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Pressley, M., Wharton-McDonald, R., Allington, R., Block, C., & Morrow, L. (1998). The nature of effective first grade literacy instruction (Report Series 11007). Albany, NY: The National Research Center on English Learning & Achievement.

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APPENDIX II

APPENDIX III

**THE BALANCED LITERACY PROGRAM IN EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
May 2002**

Setting the Context

Balanced approaches to reading have recently surged in popularity as educators try to find a middle ground that makes sense in Language Arts education. Spiegel (1998) describes three broad characteristics of balanced literacy programs. She indicates that such programs are allied to research, the programs view teachers "as informed decision makers" (p. 117), and are broad based with comprehensive views of literacy.

Patricia Cunningham's model of balanced literacy emerged in the early 1990s. After eight years of running the program, Cunningham and colleagues report consistent results in reading growth (Cunningham, Hall and Defee, 1998). Fountas and Pinnell (1996) remind us that after focusing on reading intervention for the struggling reader for many years we now need to address the child's first classroom experiences with literacy learning. Their framework for balanced literacy programming views the differing levels of teacher support as fundamental to teaching. Many of the teacher supports and specific reading prompts advocated are linked strongly to Reading Recovery procedures (Clay, 1993). Like Fountas and Pinnell, the New Zealand concept of guided reading includes a gradient of book levels. Wilkinson and Townsend's (2000) research indicates that grouping for guided reading instruction was successful in the classrooms they observed. New Zealand has a long history of successful practice in guided reading and in balancing components within a Language Arts' framework.

History of Balanced Literacy in Edmonton Public Schools

In Spring 1997, several principals in Edmonton Public Schools approached Dr. Anne Brailsford, reading specialist, and expressed a need for a framework for a Language Arts program. It was important that the framework did not promote "fads" but was based on the best research and classroom practices available. It was clear that any program would need to be balanced and moderate, meet the requirements of the new Language Arts program, and stress within-school continuity in teaching strategies and approaches.

A pilot project was undertaken in the 1997-1998 school year with 10 division one teachers in four Edmonton Public Schools. In 1998-1999 there were 19 schools; 41 schools in 1999-2000; 74 schools in 2000-2001 and there are 86 schools in the present school year that have been involved in the Balanced Literacy training at some point. Most of these schools are also involved in the kindergarten Balanced Literacy Program and approximately half are implementing the division two program.

Schools commit to two years of professional development training which consists of monthly inservicing and coaching with a reading specialist. There are 11 reading specialists involved in delivering the Balanced Literacy Program to approximately 450 teachers this year. The training program focuses instruction on three components: word work, reading and writing.

In 2000-2001 the Balanced Literacy Outreach Program was started with four outlying school districts. There are now six school districts participating who send in their reading specialists to be trained to implement the program in their school divisions.

Reference: 2001 Balanced Literacy Manual by Dr. Anne Brailsford.

Danielle Moore and Mary Winton, Reading Specialists
Coordinators of EPS Balanced Literacy Program, May 2002

BACKGROUND TO LITERACY M.A.P. (MEANINGFUL APPLIED PHONICS)

History in the District

Literacy M.A.P. employs many of the founding principles and methods presented by Romalda Spalding in her original version of **The Writing Road to Reading** (1957). The Spalding approach used teacher-directed, whole group instruction, a multi-sensory approach and sequential development moving from graphemes to spelling to writing and then to reading. In using the original **Writing Road to Reading** material, district teachers had to make necessary and research-based adjustments to the program delivery to accommodate the parameters of the Alberta Program of Studies and the needs of students in district classrooms. Carolyn Hunter, of consulting services, in creating **Literacy M.A.P.** has adapted the Spalding program for Edmonton Public Schools with its original philosophy and methods, incorporating the successful strategies district teachers have used. The **Literacy M.A.P.** resource extends the original Spalding program to include instructional strategies to teach fluency, vocabulary, comprehension and writing.

In 1997-98 a number of district teachers expressed an interest in the program and received training. Another group was trained in the 1998-99 school year. Early pilots showed the approach was having a positive impact on student learning and achievement and a number of schools adopted the approach.

Description of Literacy M.A.P.

Literacy M.A.P. is designed to provide educators with a sequential systematic approach to teaching literacy in the classroom. The resource is a compilation of the best practices gathered from teachers in our district using an explicit phonics approach, based on curricular objectives from the Alberta Program of Studies, and research summaries from the National Reading Panel's report **Teaching Children to Read**. The goal of this resource is to ensure that teachers and students have the knowledge, skills and background to form the foundation for literacy.

The key features and strength of this program are the instructional approaches for the teaching of reading and writing. Every component presented to students follows a teacher-directed, explicit, whole group instructional approach with the inclusion of a multi-sensory component. Children benefit in two ways:

- First, students become active participants in the learning process through understanding what will be taught, how it will be learned, and why they are learning about this. The teacher directs the learning through carefully sequencing new concepts and providing opportunities to reinforce previously taught material with systematic review.
- Secondly, a multi-sensory approach engages every child in learning through active participation. Information is carried to the brain via the senses. Thus, the more senses stimulated, the greater the retention. Through the use of visual, auditory, and tactile cues, the children assimilate new information with their own background knowledge. Once the information is gathered and stored, similar strategies are utilized to cue the brain to retrieve previously learned material.

As with many literacy approaches **Literacy M.A.P.** addresses the areas of reading and writing. In this approach the components are broken into four areas.

1. Phonics – children are taught 70 graphemes (single letter and multiple letter combinations for the 42 English sounds). These are taught in isolation. However, blending occurs after the first 26, spelling after the first 54.
2. Spelling – Spelling is taught through a direct instruction approach. The resource contains high frequency, subject specific, grade specific and thematic wordlists. It also teaches common word patterns, suffixes and prefixes, nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, compound words, and contractions in grades K-3. From there it moves to teaching subject specific words, Greek and Latin roots, prefixes and suffixes for grades 4-6.
3. Reading – Reading is structured and taught through whole group instruction. Each lesson is designed to include pre-reading, reading, and post reading activities. Fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension strategies are outlined.
4. Writing – Writing consists of a developmental approach; sounds to letters, letters to words (units of meaning), words to sentences (grammar), and connecting sentences (writing on a topic). Students learn to apply their language skills through teacher directed writing activities, then they move to producing independent pieces of writing in the other content areas.

Literacy M.A.P. can be found in a range of programs including regular, Cogito and Logos alternatives, Aboriginal, and in special needs. Early data indicates **Literacy M.A.P.** positively affects student achievement and gains in literacy. We are currently into our first year of a three year longitudinal study tracking students in grades one through three designed to study the effects of **Literacy M.A.P.** on children's literacy development.

Literacy M.A.P. is intended for kindergarten to grade 3.

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