



Wiltse Elementary School

640 Wiltse Blvd.

Penticton, BC V2A 8J2

Principal: Cathy Bowles

Vice-Principal: Lisa Edwards

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN (2009-10)

SCHOOL & COMMUNITY CONTEXT:

Wiltse Elementary School serves a diverse catchment area that includes the Wiltse Flats neighbourhood, the area around the north shore of Skaha Lake, the orchard/hobby farms along Valleyview Road, and East Lakeside Road south to the new subdivisions of Lakeshore Highlands and Heritage Hills.

The school consists of 16 classrooms, a computer lab with 30 stations, areas for small group instruction, a well-stocked library and, a large multipurpose room and an excellent gymnasium. The school is very fortunate to have extensive grounds that provide students with excellent play and sporting areas.

The Parent Advisory Council is a key component of Wiltse School. The parents support student achievement through the One-to-One Reading Program, their funding of additional library and learning resources and through the annual Read-a-thon. The Wiltse PAC annually supports Accelerated Reader and Star Reading Programs. The parents have enriched the schooling of the students by funding extra-curricular events, co-curricular projects and the swimming, skating and cross country skiing programs.



INQUIRY QUESTION(S)

If we have a school-wide focus on explicitly teaching the "Six Traits of Writing" will students feel more connected to the school and will academic achievement improve?

RATIONALE: What evidence compelled us to ask this inquiry question?

At a school planning day in August teachers were asked the following questions to begin conversations around our school goal:

- Where we are at? Where is Wiltse now?
- Where we want to be in three years?
- How are going to get there?
- What is the most important work you need to do?
- What is the one thing that will make the biggest difference for the students you teach?
- What is your rationale for doing this work? What evidence supports this?
- What will you do?
- How will you know you are making a difference?

The staff overwhelmingly agreed that a students' personal sense of belonging was the single most important factor in their meeting with success. The responses also indicated that we needed an increase in collaboration amongst staff members. It was voiced that by building our professional relationships we would increase our ability to reach all students. It was evident to all that creating an environment supportive of all learners was necessary in order for students to progress academically and socially.

Once we began to look at ways to increase the students' sense of belonging we felt that we did indeed build communities within our classrooms and school and perhaps the students had a greater sense of belonging than we had expressed. The wording of the original questions may have misguided the responses. We began to have conversations around academic success and how it was linked to the idea of belonging. We also discussed including aspects of reflective writing into our goal as it was felt that this could bridge nicely with the ideas associated with community building. By explicitly teaching the writing process and by using common vocabulary across the grades we felt that students should have a better understanding of themselves as writer's and feel good about themselves as learners.

During conversations "The Write Traits" was mentioned as a potential resource that would enable teachers to teach writing with a common thread throughout the grades. It was decided that we would look at the Six Traits of Writing in order to increase students knowledge of the strategies and related vocabulary used when teaching writing. The concept of "talking about their learning" was a logical next step as we moved from a focus on reading instruction to one of writing.

By using this question as a starting point grade groups were formed and teams met to streamline their focus, develop an inquiry question and devise a plan specific to the needs of students at their grade level while still related to the focus of our collective group.

Our grade 2 & 3 group believe that students need to thoroughly understand what "good writing" looks and sounds like in order to write to the best of their ability. "Write Traits" explicitly teaches six writing traits or qualities that make writing work. The main objectives of the resource address areas that will increase students understanding of writing by:

- increasing students' understanding of and use of writers' language
- extending the amount of writing students feel comfortable doing
- helping students' build an ear for what works well in writing
- building students' confidence in themselves as writers

Our grade 4 & 5 group believes that Write Traits is a way of teaching writing that helps students understand what good writing is and how to achieve it. It is based on the premise that students that become strong self assessors become better writers and revisers. They will gain confidence that comes from knowing writers language and having options for revision, and demonstrate an increase in a positive attitude and enjoyment of the writing process.

ACTION PLAN (GRADE 2 & 3)

INQUIRY QUESTIONS (Grade 2&3):

Will explicitly teaching the six traits, using the Write Traits Resource, enable the students to evaluate a piece of writing and justify their assessment using writer's language specific to the six traits?

STRUCTURES AND STRATEGIES: For all students and our most vulnerable learners.

- choose one piece of writing for students to evaluate at each grade level. The sample will be a developing piece of writing which would benefit from some revision in all six trait areas. (January)
- complete a baseline assessment activity with each class following the process outlined below. (January)
- teach the Ideas and Organization Trait units (additional units as time permits) with specific attention to the Student Rubrics (criteria for good writing). (January to June)
- repeat the sample paper / assessment process at the end of the year. (June)

The following rubric scales will be used (taken directly from the Write Traits resource):

Grade 2	Grade 3
IT'S A START. (something has been put on paper)	WEAK (needing considerable revision)
GETTING THERE... (many positives, could be revised, expanded, clarified)	SOMEWHAT STRONG (needing some revision)
MADE IT! (strong effort, achieves it's purpose)	STRONG (needing little revision)

Process for completing the baseline assessment:

1. Provide each student with a copy of the sample paper.
2. Present the questions: Do you think this is a good piece of writing? Why or why not?
3. Read the sample paper to all students. Have students track on their own copy.
4. Have them read chorally, with a partner and individually.
5. Students independently assess the piece of writing in the space provided. They must justify their answer. Teachers/CEAs may read for and scribe for students as needed in order to have an accurate account of their ideas. No extra vocabulary is provided in order for our comparison pre and post to be accurate.

ASSESSMENT PROCESS & TOOLS: What will we use to measure our success?

- Compare the January and June assessment activities to evaluate whether or not students are better able to evaluate a piece of writing using language specific to writing.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING:

- On going collaboration between classroom teachers.

RESOURCES: What do we currently have and what do we need?

- Write Traits Classroom Kits (Great Source Education Group – Houghton Mifflin)

ACTION PLAN (GRADE 4 & 5)

INQUIRY QUESTIONS (Grade 4&5):

Will explicitly teaching the six writing traits (Using Write Traits) improve students' disposition towards writing (self-confidence, positive attitude and enjoyment)?

Will explicitly teaching the six writing traits (Using Write Traits) improve students' ability to understand what good writing is and how to achieve it?

STRUCTURES AND STRATEGIES: For all students and our most vulnerable learners:

- Develop a survey to be given to students pre- and post-teaching of Write Traits.
- Introduce the six traits in grade 4 and 5 classes.
- Each teacher will teach specific lessons based on classroom needs.
- Two classes and the Learning Assistance Teacher collaborated to plan and carry out a series of writing lessons that provided in-class support to struggling writers while continuing to meet the same learning targets as other students.

ASSESSMENT PROCESS & TOOLS: What will we use to measure our success?

- Teachers developed a survey designed to be given to students pre- and post-teaching of the "Write Traits".

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING:

- On going collaboration between classroom teachers.

RESOURCES: What do we currently have and what do we need?

- Write Traits Classroom Kits (Great Source Education Group – Houghton Mifflin)
- Post survey date to be decided.

ACTION PLAN (GRADE K & 1)

- Our Kindergarten teachers previewed the Write Traits resource to determine its appropriateness and suitability for their program, teaching style and philosophy. It was unanimously decided that it didn't support the process that was successfully being used at Wiltse to introduce Kindergarten students to the printed word. We continue to look for an appropriate resource for this level.
- Grade One teachers have also previewed the Write Traits resource and are currently working on a plan for September 2010.

EVIDENCE**KEY FINDINGS:**

- At the grade 4/5 level a success story was the cooperative approach to lesson planning and delivery. Students met with success in a learning environment that enabled instruction to be scaffolded to meet a variety of learning needs. All students' quality of work improved and their reflective thinking was deepened by using justification in their responses. Teachers reported that it was much easier to have individual conversations with students during their learning. The shared facilitation proved to be a good professional growth opportunity and was recommended to all staff as an option for support service delivery.
- At the grade 2/3 level teachers reported that they felt students were better able to talk about writing and comment on specific aspects of a good piece of writing. It was felt that the quality of student writing was showing improvement but the quantity had not significantly increased yet.
- Other key findings will be analyzed following the completion of our plans. We will compare the pre- and post-assessments to look for evidence that shows a greater understanding and use of writer's vocabulary. We will look at student and parent responses on the Satisfaction Survey to determine whether their belief in themselves as writers has improved. We will begin to collect and track data from the School-Wide Write, looking for trends over time.

REFLECTION AND SUMMARY**REFLECTIONS: What did we learn? How did it make a difference?**

- As a staff, we learned that small changes to our practices can have meaningful impact on the learning of our students. By working together in a professional way we not only help students grow academically and socially, we ask ourselves questions that require deep thought and reflection. The conversations allow for the collective sharing of ideas, the chance to ponder our practices together and the opportunity to question our intentions. We strengthen our understanding of teaching and learning and together we are able to celebrate successes and learn from the challenges that present themselves.

FUTURE PLANNING/ PROFESSIONAL LEARNING/ PARENT INVOLVEMENT:

- As a result of our inquiry, we now realize we need to spend more time creating a professional learning community amongst all teachers. This collaborative approach could be a professional development focus at:
 - staff meetings
 - team meetings
 - school-based professional development activities
 - district-based professional development

- We have a group of teacher-leaders who have knowledge and experience in Professional Learning Communities and are eager to guide others on a journey to a more collaborative model of teaching.

- We are interested in inviting Judith King to work with our staff through the next stages of the inquiry process.

- Parents should be introduced to the “Write Traits” through a workshop during the 2010-2011 school year including demonstrating the “clothesline” continuum to show skill growth over time.

School Planning Council:

Name (Principal): _____

Name (Parent): _____

Name (Parent): _____

Name (Parent): _____