

research snapshot

summarize mobilize



Elementary schools need block time to plan and embed diverse language and literacy learning

What is this research about?

Classrooms have become more diverse places with students and teachers contributing cultures and languages from around the world. There is a great urgency for language and literacy instruction that meets current, distinct and varied needs. Students are not only growing up as “digital natives”, but also as leaders in the future of technology. However, Ministry curricula and testing continue to focus on paper-and-pencil-based literacy skills. This study developed a new model of in-service teacher education. It sought ways to respond to and embed multiliteracies education for the multicultural and multilingual classes of today.

What did the researchers do?

A long-term research project worked to co-develop new teaching approaches to literacies in elementary schools. It ran from 2002 to 2012, and focused on schools in an urban context. The research agenda for the project included goals to:

- Build a model for multiliteracies education by including community-based languages in the classroom;

What you need to know:

Elementary schools should allot a half-day block each week towards project-based, shared learning. Through guidance, schools can consider ways to create inclusive, and reflective, digitally-enabled language and literacy instruction.

- Create custom text products through digital technologies.

A learning community was formed at Joyce Public School. Through collaborative action research methods, it included: teachers, university researchers, and school community members. Their shared input informed recommendations for responsive literacy.

What did the researchers find?

The researchers found that collaboration and project-based learning were critical in language and literacy education.

Collaboration facilitated:

- Creative planning;
- Helping teachers to avoid feeling stuck,

confused or left behind;

- Supportive groups that helped connect language, digital literacy, learning styles and challenges.

Project-based learning also offered the school and community the opportunity to explore:

- Learning strategies across ages, curriculum, and within a peer-learner setting;
- Ways to motivate and support creative, critical and agentive learning by children;
- Custom learning and textual tools to create multilingual inclusion and digital interaction.

The researchers recommended across-the-curriculum (including cross-age) projects. They also suggested a half-day block per school week, dedicated to collaboration and project-based learning. Together with the teachers the researchers developed strategies for digital literacy and community language inclusion for the classroom.

How can you use this research?

Principals may find this research useful, as it offers a model to work with teachers, parents and community members to develop inclusive literacy. It may also inform school and board agendas about multilingual classrooms.

This research also offers teachers and in-service teachers insight on areas of need among our students today. There is a focus on the relevance of technology and diverse

language and literacy instruction. It may also inform teacher-led efforts for professional development among colleagues.

About the Researchers

Heather Lotherington is Professor of Multilingual Education at York University. Jennifer Jenson is Professor of Pedagogy and Technology at York University. This ResearchSnapshot comes from the final SSHRC report on their research project, "Researching new literacies in the multilingual classroom: Developing a ludic approach to linguistic challenges in elementary education.

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Keywords

Language, literacies, multimodality, multiliteracies, elementary education, digital technology, students, inclusion, schools, teachers, community.

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