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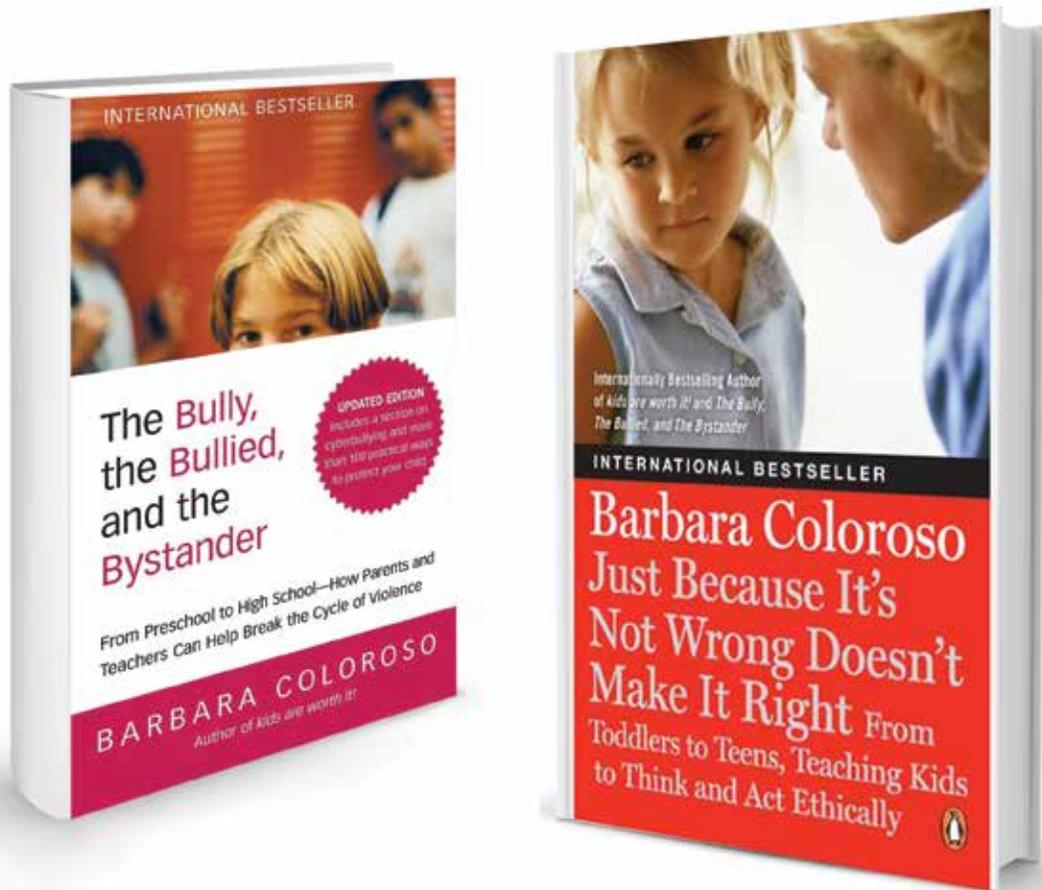
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Index to Advertisers

Greetings CAP Colleagues, This edition of the CAP Journal indicates that we are more than half way through another school year. I am certain that everyone is busy and challenged by the ever increasing demands on school communities which alter and escalate our leadership responsibilities. My conversations with colleagues across the county confirm however, that despite our hectic schedules and insurmountable workloads, the journey of professional learning continues.



Tina Estabrooks

President, Canadian Association
of Principals



The CAP Board had a very productive meeting in November. With the successful launch of our study on the “Role of the Principalship” in mind, we began conversations to determine our next steps. Recognizing the need for research in the area of leadership, CAP is decidedly committed to fostering relationships that will provide opportunities to participate in research and creating professional development opportunities that will enhance the performance of all school leaders.

The 2015 CAP Conference is only four months away. The beautiful resort town of Whistler, British Columbia is the location for this year’s event entitled Connecting Leaders: Inspiring Learning. The five keynote speakers, Simon Breakspear, Jesse Miller, Frederick Brown, Wab Kinew and Stephanie Hamilton will undoubtedly enlighten and respectfully challenge our professional thoughts and practices. The vast menu of breakout sessions promises to create a most meaningful experience and the opportunity to connect and network with colleagues across the nation will be time well spent. The conference program and registration is accessible on the CAP website. We look forward to seeing many of you there.

Like many I recall schooling where, as a student, I sat in an assigned seat, faced forward, listening to the teacher who furiously provided a chalkboard précis of a chapter from a text and who would soon thereafter require a concise replication of all the facts. We can fast forward to a more recent era when education was confronted with the notion that educators were responsible for not only teaching but learning. The rightful and long overdue paradigm shift that largely removed successful learning from the shoulders of students and repositioned it upon the shoulders of educators, continues to evolve. We have gained appreciation for collaborative approaches, data driven instruction and responsive intervention. This edition of the journal with its focus on Data Driven Leadership touches on many aspects of our transition. The articles will remind us of our need to be visionary, abstain from isolated decision making and to “practice what we preach” by finding ways to collect data on ourselves that can enhance our ability to add synergy within our schools. I am certain you will find it a valuable addition to your professional library.

In closing, I send my best wishes to you, your staff and students. Stay safe and continue to challenge yourself and those who work alongside you.

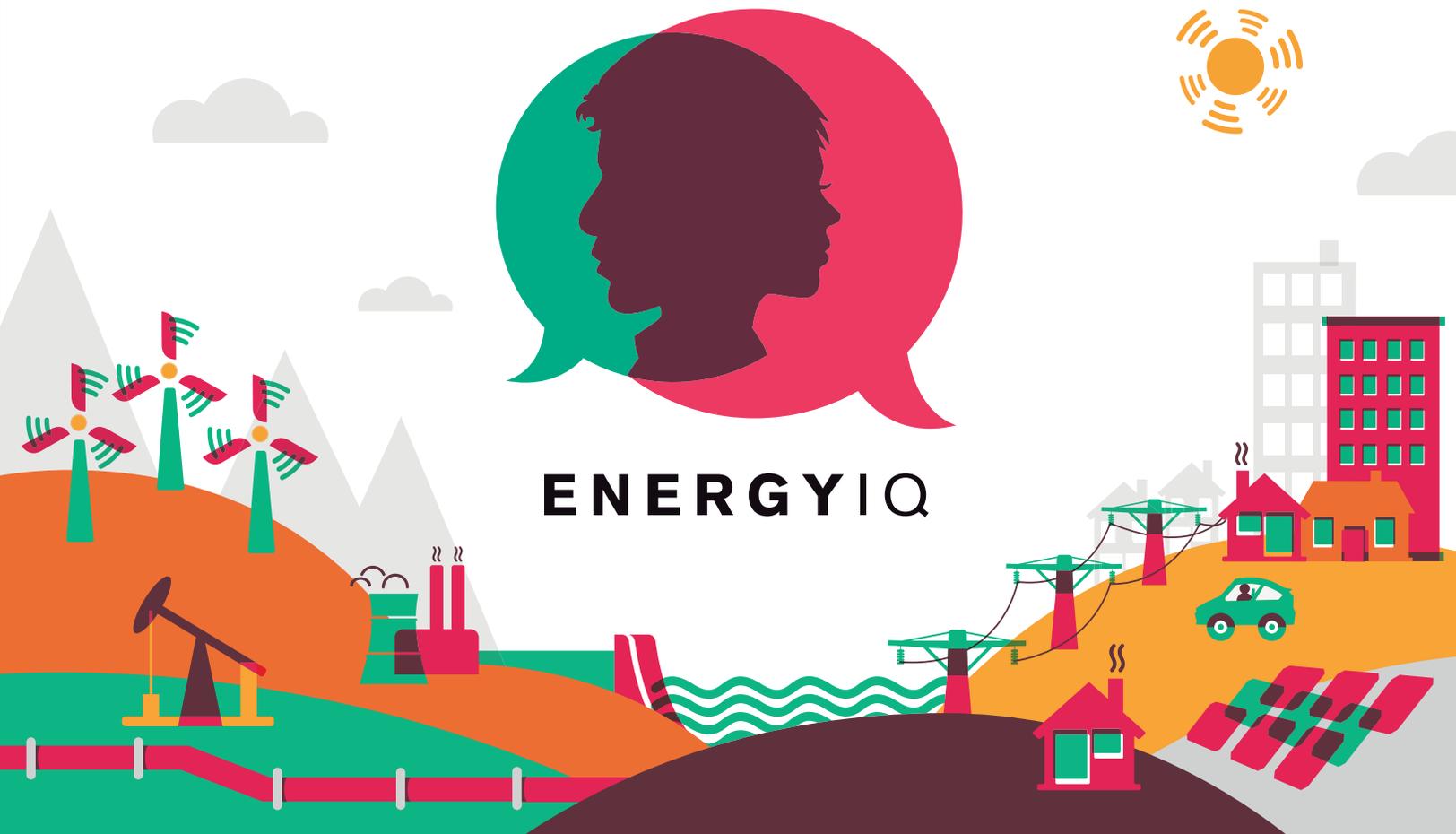
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Tina Estabrooks

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Winter snows are upon us as we collectively prepare from coast to coast to coast for all that comes during this proud season that seems to identify us as true Canadians. Just as winter events bring us together as a nation so must our unified efforts to enhance the position of instructional leaders across Canada into one voice that

represents a pedagogically strong, structured yet culturally diverse education system. A system which supports instructional leaders and the students that we serve each and every day. Canada is a vast nation that is as diverse as its landscape and yet as the Canadian Association of Principals Executive and Board of Directors meet at a common table it is comforting to hear that the daily experiences and needs of our colleagues across the nation have many common threads. This gives strength to the need for a unified voice via CAP, which brings us together in search of responsible and relevant responses to the challenges our members face daily in support of proud individuals who are committed to their schools, school systems, provinces and territories.

CAP continues to advocate for Canadian Instructional Leaders in many ways, one being the showcasing of topic areas that are relevant to our members through our Journal. Within this Cap Journal we have brought a focus on the "Use of Data to Drive School Based Decision Making". The use of current, relevant and accurate data has become a valuable tool for school administrators and educators alike as we gather analyze and apply the data both formal and informal to guide us in our daily practice. Whether the data originates from a study such as "The Future of the Principals in Canada", A National Research Study, a collaborative project of the Canadian Association of Principals and the Alberta Teachers' Association, or is drawn from student work, achievement test scores, surveys, focus groups or observations, it is imperative that we recognize its value in guiding our present and future practice. As educational leaders we need to find a balance in the amount and type of data that sits before us as we could easily find ourselves drowning in a sea of data if not careful.

In the coming year we see Principals, Vice Principals and other educational leaders facing academic and societal challenges that go far beyond the four walls of a school or school system. The information, training and networking that is involved in successfully navigating the challenges that lie ahead are as diverse as the needs of the students we serve. In recognizing the talents of colleagues around us, communicating with professional associations within our provinces and territories and taking advantage of the many powerful professional development opportunities that CAP and CAP affiliates offer to Educational Leaders across the country will put us in good stead as we move forward together. I encourage you to continue to build that network of colleagues that you can communicate with, share ideas and knowledge with and that will bring you a sense of being part of a team albeit separated in some instances by geography or by understanding. Reach out to the provincial affiliates that serve to support the needs of school administrators for support or to become active participants. Attend meetings or conferences such as the CAP National Conference May 11 – 14 at Whistler, BC and experience the personal and professional growth that comes from being part of such a large and informative event. And remember, when you see something that you feel is of value and that you would like to share with fellow educational leaders, contact me as the editor of the CAP Journal and we can see where the information best fits for all.

Sincerely,
Mike Landry – CAP Editor

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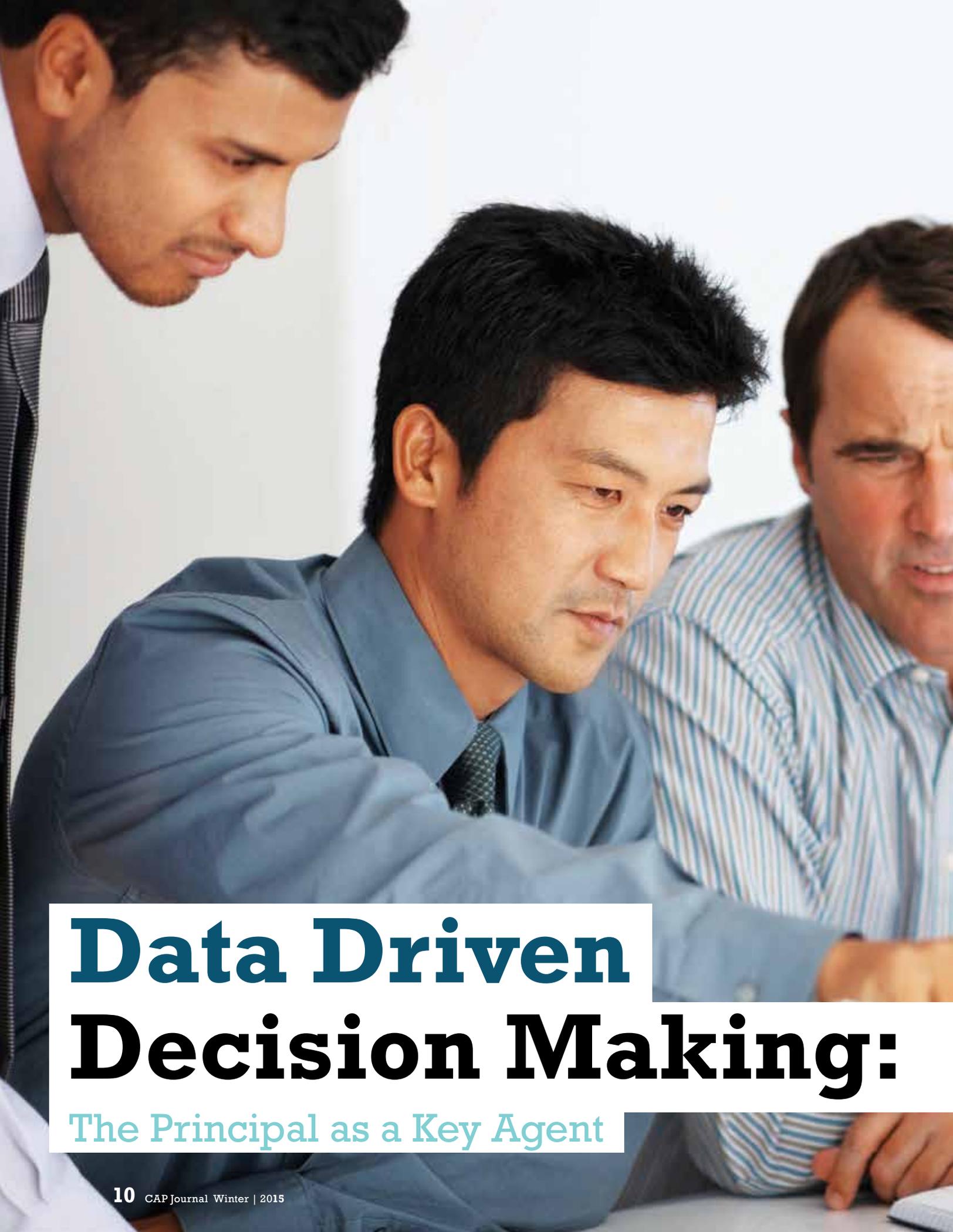
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Data Driven

Decision Making:

The Principal as a Key Agent



Data driven decision making is the process by which administrators and teachers gather and interpret data to guide various educational decisions (Levin & Datnow, 2012). Levin and Datnow explained that it is imperative that educators have knowledge about the use of data, so they can make informed decisions. In 2012, Lakeshore School Division in Manitoba, Canada, embarked on a systemic change initiative called Reimagine Lakeshore. This initiative supports their learning vision for 2013 and beyond which suggests that teachers, with the support of principals, will develop plans and policies on data driven decision making, classroom-based or school-wide, that will meet the needs of all learners and engage them in learning. The Reimagine process has begun to address the vision by developing a culture of trust, collaboration, relationship building, and risk-taking meant to address the learning needs of every student. This initiative also encourages teachers, and administrators to gather information that they can use to understand the learning needs of all students in their schools and classrooms. Lakeshore School Division stakeholders have established explicit, measurable, system-wide goals for student progress. During an interview, school division administrators acknowledged the important role of principals within these reform efforts.

Fullan (2002) confirmed that effective school leaders are key players in large scale, sustainable education reform. To accomplish successful reform, school leaders must create a fundamental transformation in the learning culture of their schools (Fullan, 2002; Levin & Datnow, 2012). Levin & Datnow explained that the role of the principal in data driven decision making efforts is crucial, and plays a major role in realizing data driven decision making within the school. The principal is the key agent influencing other stakeholders in implementing data driven decision for systemic change.

Effective use of data will enable educators to: be well-informed, effectively review their present capacities, identify weaknesses, improve instruction, and plan effectively for school improvements (Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Levin & Datnow, 2012). Levin & Datnow referred to reform success as a “co-construction of individuals and policies at different levels” (p. 180) in the educational system. Co-construction requires that individuals at all levels contribute to the policy making process through continuous interactions among the key players in the system. Levin & Datnow (2012) described the school division as a key player in helping the schools to build the skills and capacity to use data for decision making. They described the role of the principal as the link in actualizing the division’s vision for data use at the classroom level. Co-construction enables the principal to work in an interactive relationship with teachers to affect student learning. Likewise, the principal mediates division policies that impact teaching and learning activities in the classroom, and establishes school-level policies in collaboration with school staff.

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As the liaison between the division and the school, the principal must engage in four key activities

(Wohlstetter, Datnow, & Park, 2008; Levin & Datnow, 2012):

1. **Goal setting – cultivating shared objectives by setting goals**
2. **Aligning the goals of the division, the school and the curriculum**
3. **Providing support for staff – building human and social capital**
4. **Creating a climate of trust, collaboration, and culture of data use**



It is a transparent framework that makes people feel comfortable with where they are at, where they are going, what the steps are, what to expect at each step. It is a process that will move them forward through the change process.

The Division embraced this framework for moving forward through their explorations and improvement plans.

Once the design process was initiated Lakeshore School Division leaders received additional expertise and funding through participation in a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council - Community University Research Alliance (SSHRC-CURA) with researchers from Brandon University. Through the design process, the School Division identified 13 different topics that they wanted to explore. These ranged from alternative scheduling, to integrating technology, to multiage learning groups. The Brandon University project helped them to align the variety of projects into three areas: technology integration, instructional practices, and facilities.

As the design process was implemented, principals were asked to work with the staff at their schools to imagine something that they believed would truly make a difference for their students. Groups who were investigating different topics were encouraged to review the literature, to visit schools that had found success with similar initiatives, and to propose projects that would see those changes become realities in their classrooms and their schools. In the fall of 2013, the projects were ready to be applied within the schools and Principals were tasked with overseeing a variety of projects in several different areas. Some schools experienced significant changes as teachers experimented with team teaching or redesigned spaces. The School Division supported the plans with the necessary resources and the freedom to experiment without the fear of failure. Lakeshore School Division encouraged schools to take ownership of their students' learning and enabled stakeholders at all levels to contribute to the Division's vision through continuous interactions.



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Data driven decision making reforms cannot be implemented in isolation, the division and schools have to co-create similar objectives and values (Wohlstetter, Datnow, & Park, 2008).

The “Reimagine Lakeshore” process, which officially launched in December of 2012, was undertaken to instigate school improvement in a risk-free environment that would ultimately lead to improved achievement and engagement for all students. The School Division followed a design process conceptualized by Dr. Sheila Giesbrecht, a consultant working with Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning. Giesbrecht (2014) described the design process as one “that allows users to own a process, contextualize important perspectives, learn from other environments, and have autonomy” (p. 169). She developed a design-based process for school reform in five stages: understand, problemate, ideate, experiment, and model. During an interview with researchers from Brandon University in the spring of 2014, Giesbrecht explained how the design process would facilitate changes,

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During an interview with the Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent of Lakeshore School Division in the spring of 2014, they discussed the important role that principals play in a systemic change initiative. They articulated that the success of the initiative depended on the work of the school leaders and they confirmed the need for additional support and encouragement for principals as their schools moved through the experiment phase and into the implementation of the new knowledge. The Superintendent stated that "school leaders are key...they have done more research. They have dug in. They've phoned people. They've communicated with other colleagues ... we'll put a little more pressure and support on our principals to say, okay let's see if we can get another something going in your school". As a result of this environment of responsibility and support, school principals in Lakeshore have started to develop organizational cultures that endorse the use of data for decision making.

Principals in Lakeshore School Division have been key agents in the success of the process. They work in collaborative relationships with teachers, school division leaders, and consultants to influence and improve student learning. They develop plans that articulate the division's goals and that establish a culture of data use. The principals encourage collaboration across and within grade levels and subject areas to diagnose problems and refine practice. In focus group discussions with teachers in the spring of 2014, participants identified enhanced levels of collaboration across the division as one of the most significant changes to take place as a result of the Reimagine Lakeshore process. The principals are called upon to ensure that practice continues to align with the goals of the school, the division, and the curriculum. Additionally, principals provide the necessary guidance and support to realize division's vision and to develop capacity for school staff to use data. **CJ**

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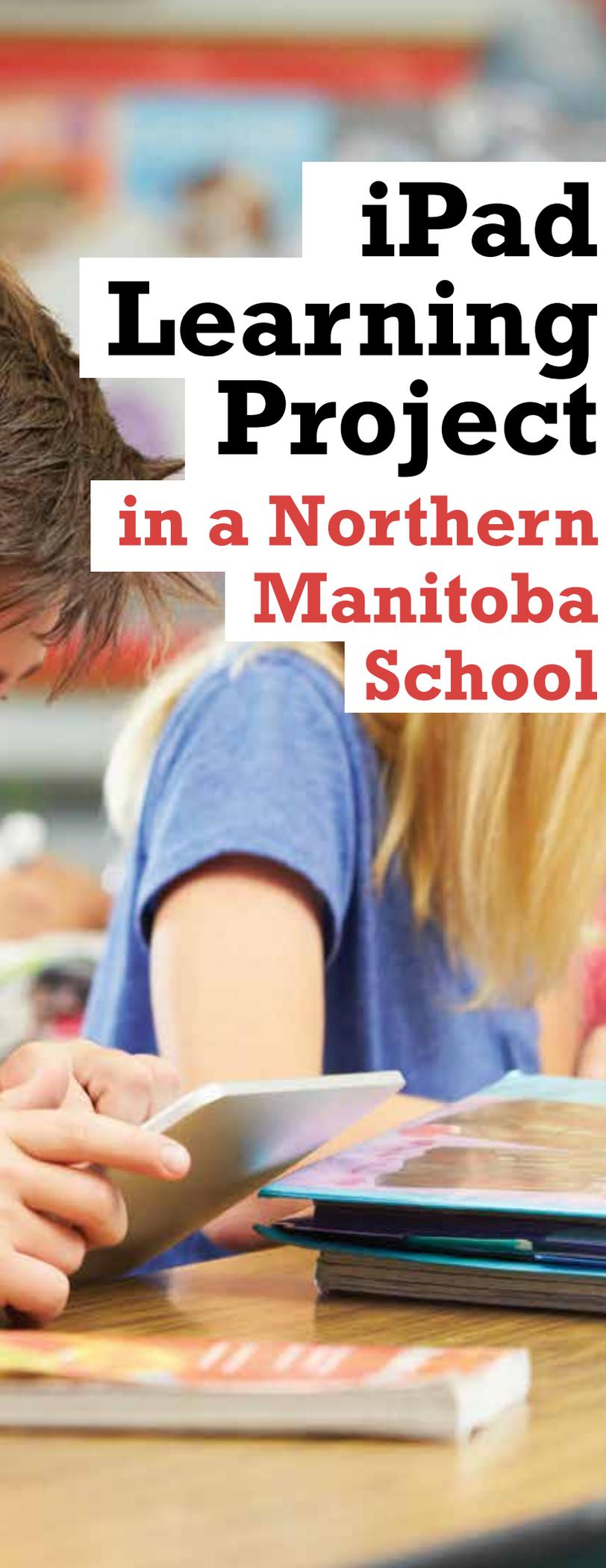
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iPad Learning Project

in a Northern Manitoba School

This research was part of the VOICE Research Project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada.

iPad Learning Project in a Northern Manitoba School

Louise Loewen and Marion Terry

This action research project focused on using iPad technology to improve academic skills and school engagement. In phase one, students from grades 5-8 participated in 270 minutes of digital literacy classes per week, using iPad apps for remedial instruction in English language arts (ELA) and math. In phase two, students in grades 5-8 and an ungraded class participated in 195 minutes of digital literacy classes per week, using other iPad apps for project-based learning. We also broadened the use of iPads to support general subject-based learning in grades 5-12, the ungraded class, and adult high school classes.

Phase One, 2013

The digital literacy teachers chose 41 iPad apps for ELA and math remediation in grades 5-8. The 21 students who were targeted for the research because of their low literacy and math performance spent three 30-minute sessions per day, three days a week, in iPad remediation in April and May 2013. The data for phase one consisted of the following student records: attendance records, discipline referrals, and in-school ELA and math marks.

Results

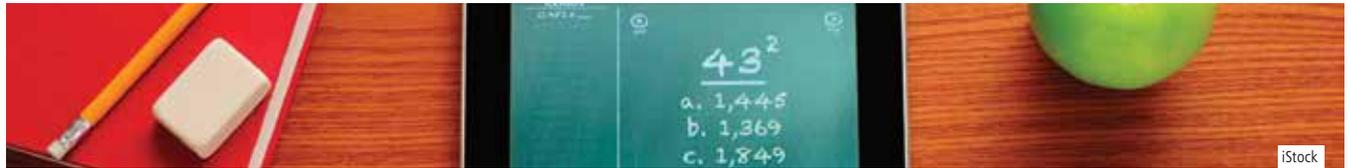
There were no significant changes in the targeted students' attendance and discipline referrals between the months prior to and during the iPad sessions.

However, there were significant increases in the targeted students' ELA and math marks between April and June 2013. In ELA, 12 of the 21 students showed improvement: 3 by a partial grade level, 6 by a full grade level, and 3 by two full grade levels. In math, 14 of the 21 students showed improvement: 3 by a partial grade level, 4 by a full grade level, and 7 by two full grade levels.

Unfortunately, the teachers and educational assistant attached to the digital literacy class reported that most of the students did not enjoy spending 90 minutes a day on remedial ELA and math apps. Therefore, although the digital literacy sessions appear to have been successful in raising many of the at-risk students' literacy and math scores, they were primarily unsuccessful in enhancing these students' engagement in school.

Discussion

The targeted students progressed through the app levels, and many of their ELA and math scores improved – several by two complete grade levels. However, the overall consensus of staff members attached to the digital literacy classes was that the students did not particularly enjoy the iPad experience.



Phase Two, 2013-14

First, we addressed security issues, in order to restrict app downloads by students and facilitate app downloads by staff. Students were assigned numbered iPads, making it easier to identify which students to contact if the iPads were compromised.

Then, we made the iPads available to all of our grades 5-12 and adult high school teachers. We provided two full days of professional development, wherein teachers learned to use iPads to enrich classroom instruction in a variety of subject areas. iPad-based projects also replaced the previous year's "remedial apps" during the digital literacy classes. We reduced the digital literacy classes to three 65-minute sessions per week for students in grades 5-8 and an ungraded class.

We tracked iPad use by means of sign-out sheets for the teachers and feedback response sheets for both teachers and students. We sought further teacher feedback during staff meetings, and we accessed the following student records: attendance records, discipline referrals, and in-school ELA and math marks.

Results

Our results focus on issues of security, technological support, feedback from students and teachers, and various student records.

Security. When two students put passcodes on the iPads, we had to rely on them to reveal the passcodes before the iPads could be reset in the iPad configurator. Using the iPad configurator to return the iPads to their original state every day also proved problematic because work could not be saved from one day to the next. In April 2014, we changed to a once-a-week restoration.

Technological Support. Between September 2013 and April 2014, one of our "technology enthusiast" teachers volunteered 166 after-school hours to look after the iPads. We currently have 137 apps on each iPad in addition to the apps that are standard to the iPads.

Professional Development. It is one thing to try out the apps, but another to use the apps and the iPads effectively in a classroom setting. We provided two days of PD: to our school's teachers in November 2013 and to division-wide staff in February 2014. Feedback for both days was very positive. The teachers reported feeling confident that they could use iPad applications to enrich their classroom instruction. For example, the digital literacy class teachers developed 24 projects with clear rubrics for assessment.

Feedback from Students and Teachers. Students of all ages reported that they enjoyed the iPad projects and would welcome



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further opportunities to engage in iPad-based classroom instruction. In addition to the non-curricular projects during digital literacy classes, teachers reported using iPads to enhance classroom lessons in ELA, math, family studies, and science.

Staff connected to the digital literacy classes reported that the 65-minute time periods were too long.

Student Records. We analysed the following student records: attendance, discipline referrals, and in-school ELA and math marks.

Although 8 of the 21 targeted students attended a total of 167 days more between September 2013 and May 2014 than in the same months in 2012-13, overall there was little difference in the students who participated in the digital literacy classes.

Of these 21 students, 19 were referred to the office at least once for behaviour incidents between September 2013 and May 2014. However, of the total 168 discipline referrals, only 18 were from the digital literacy class. One student who had all 5 of his referrals from the digital literacy class was permitted to take an alternative class but later asked to rejoin the digital literacy class without further incidents.

We compared ELA marks in September 2013 and May 2014. Of the 21 students, 12 improved their ELA levels: 6 by a partial grade and 6 by a full grade. The teachers explained the other 9 students' lack of progress as follows: 1 had significant learning challenges

in writing, 1 had ongoing health issues, and the remaining 7 had chronic attendance and classroom behaviour problems. When in school, 6 of these students participated fully in the digital literacy classes, but they did not submit ELA assignments.

We compared math marks in September 2013 and May 2014. Of the 21 students, 14 improved their math levels: 12 by a partial grade and 2 by a full grade. The teachers explained the other 7 students' lack of progress as follows: 1 had ongoing health issues, and the remaining 6 had chronic attendance and classroom behaviour problems. When in school, these 6 students participated fully in the digital literacy classes, but they did not complete any math units in 2013-14.

Discussion

Attendance patterns did not change from 2012-13, but teachers reported that students were more engaged and participated readily in the iPad activities in 2013-14. The students' literacy and numeracy skills also improved, but not as dramatically as in phase 1. The teachers created a rich set of lesson plans and assessment rubrics for shared use. The digital literacy classes were too long, but they gave students of various ages an opportunity to collaborate and develop social interactions.

Conclusion

When used appropriately, iPads can enhance students' academic skills and school engagement. They are a technological tool that supports, rather than replaces, the teacher. **CJ**

AUTHORS

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Dr. Marion Terry is the Brandon University professor who served as research consultant for the research project. She has teaching experience in elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education, and administrative experience in adult education and literacy.

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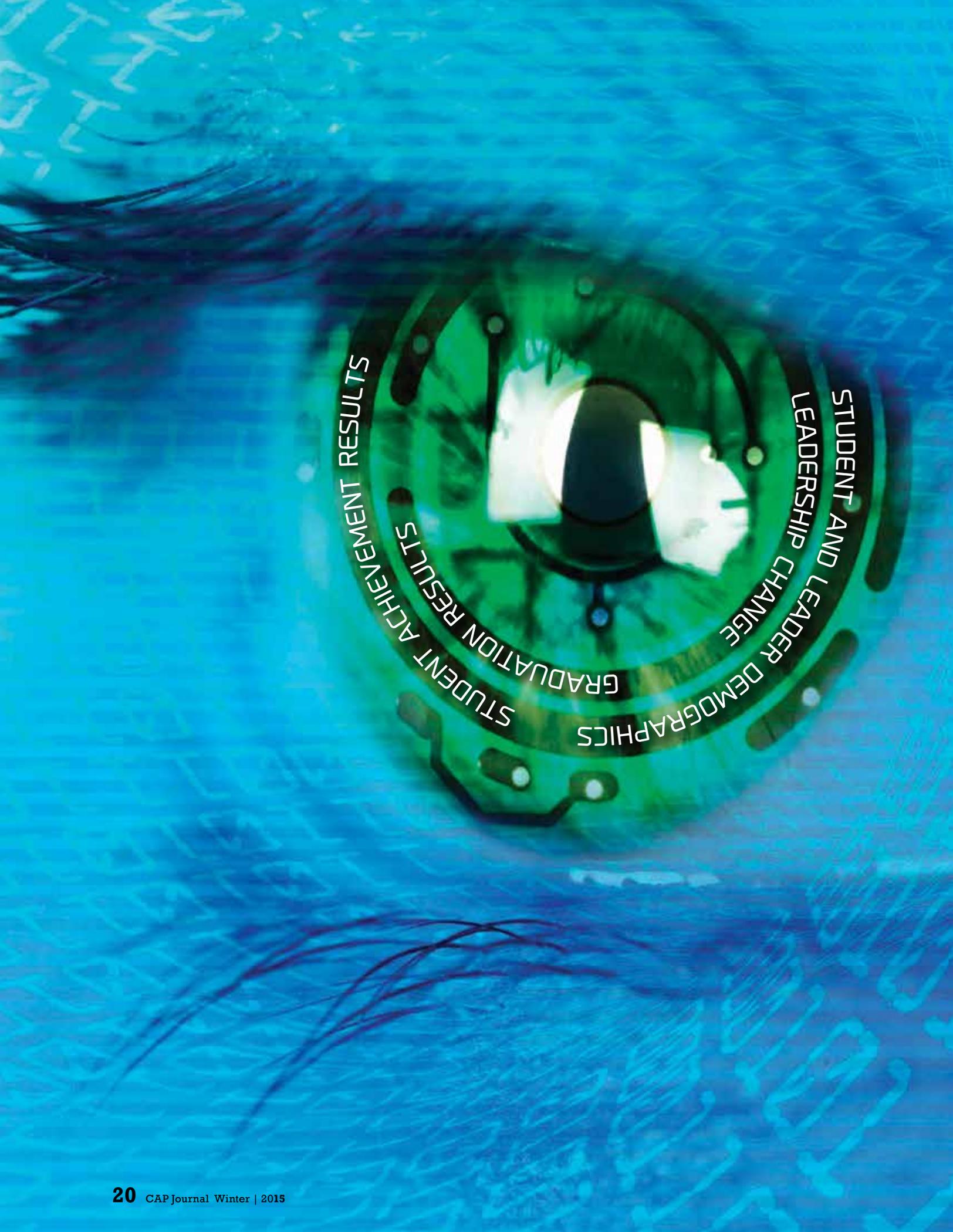
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LEADERSHIP CHANGE

Data-Driven Leadership

What does the data tell us about the role of the principal?

It is hard to avoid a conversation on educational leadership. Social media bombards us with the essential skills of leaders. A simple taxi ride can lead to a heated discussion with the driver about the principal of his son's school. Perhaps it is the fact that the majority of Western society has attended school. Simply put, it is our common denominator; we all have an opinion on education.

Across Canada, the conversation on student achievement has evolved. In my tenure as a school leader, I have seen the focus on data move from school-based report cards to provincial and international assessments. Educators are developing proficiency in data collection and analysis in order to capture student learning. So what does the data tell us about the role of the principal?

Evident in both academic and management literature is the belief that effective leadership is vital to organizational success. Educational success is linked to improving student learning and the quality of schools and systems (Leithwood and Louis, 2011). The educational leader is fundamental to the functioning and success of the system. Research indicates the direct influence of leadership on student achievement (Waters, Marzano, and McNulty, 2003; Wahlstrom et al., 2012). Wahlstrom et al. (2012) suggest that in order to impact student achievement, a synergy needs to be created across multiple, relevant variables. The school leader is expected to create and ensure this synergy.

Thus, the essential expectation for the school principal is to create a successful academic experience. Louis and Wahlstrom (2010) contend that consistent, informed support from the school leader makes a difference to student achievement. Hallinger (2005) supports that the role needs to be enacted consistently through supportive behaviours as well as direct coaching or modeling and identifies four roles of the principal: resource provider, instructional resource, communicator and visible presence.

Other works (Blase and Blase, 1999; Leithwood et al., 2010) identify functions and characteristics that include facilitating collaborative efforts among teachers, using instructional research to make decisions, designing effective staff development opportunities and curriculum development. Louis and Wahlstrom (2010) argue that instructional leadership is important but indirectly linked to student achievement. While instructional leadership maintains a singular focus on classroom instruction and practice, they note the importance of the leader in creating a learning organization with a common vision and focus on leadership for learning.



A Data Snapshot

As part of my initial doctoral research on school leadership and leadership development, I explored the relationship between the principal and student achievement. Similar studies (Dhuey and Smith, 2013; Coelli and Green, 2009; Branch, Hanushek and Rivkin (2009)) focus on the overall effect of specific principal qualities on achievement. Using a time series panel of public data (2004-2012) from a school district, I explored the relationship between the school leader and student success. Data included student achievement results from provincial key stage comprehensive assessments, graduation

results, student and leader demographics and changes in leadership.

Quantitative analysis was conducted to explore the relationship between student success and leadership. Aligned with current research (Leithwood and Mascall, 2008; Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe, 2008; Sammons, Gu, Day & Ko, 2011), this study tested the direct impact of school leader variables on student achievement. Specifically, the variables of principal gender, seniority and leadership changes at the school were investigated along with other indirect variables such as demographics and socioeconomic status.

Initial Findings

Regressions were conducted on each independent variable identified in the data. Variables that were not considered statistically significant ($t < \pm 1.96, p > 0.05$) were reviewed. Table 1 provides a summary of the findings related to the principal variables in terms of the hypothesized relationship with student achievement. While correlations in the data are evident, causality is not implied. Further investigation using multiple methods is required to make causal claims.

Table 1: Summary of Initial Findings

Variable	Comments	Hypothesized relationship
Principal Gender	Generally, the principal gender variable has small/moderate impact on high school graduation results, some Grade 6 Language Arts results and attendance and retention rates.	No relationship
Principal Seniority	Small- Moderate correlation between years of service and honours graduation, general graduation, Grade 9 LA, and attendance rates	Strong relationship
First Principal Change	Highest number of correlations at all Grade levels (3,6,9, high school) and subject levels as well as attendance and retention rates	Moderate positive relationship
2nd Principal Change	Second highest number of correlations- high school grad rates, Grade 6 LA, Grade 9 LA, Grade 3, 6 and 9 Math and attendance	Moderate relationship
3rd Principal Change	Third highest number of correlations- General and High School graduation rates, Grade 3 Reading, Grade 6 Reading, Grade 9 LA, grade 3 and 6 Math	Small relationship

Building on the Data

These initial data warrant investigation into the impact of the principal on student achievement. Of particular interest is the impact of the change in leadership at the school level. Given the number of correlations between the change in leadership and student results, school leaders that were representative of this change were selected for further analysis. Open-ended interviews were conducted with 82 percent of the principals of schools who had a change in leadership since 2013.

In order to investigate how these principals lead, several key questions were identified and include:

1. What key assets does the new principal bring to the role that add value to student success?
2. What learning experiences are key to the principal's development?
3. How does the new principal manage, engage and lead the school community to ensure student success?
4. How does the new principal think and make decisions?

Current Analysis

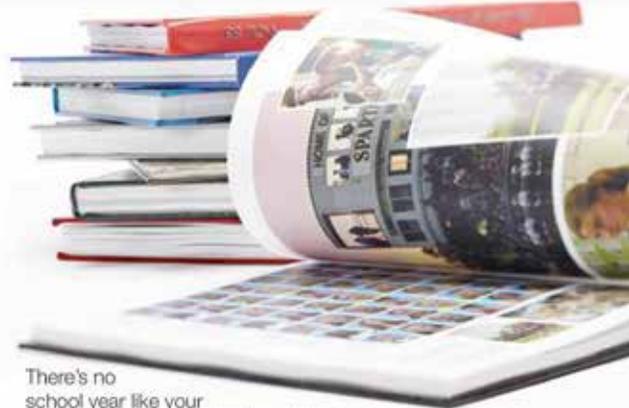
Detailed analysis of these qualitative elements is still ongoing but several key themes have emerged. The data suggests that, similar to other findings (Louis and Wahlstrom, 2009; Hallinger, 2005, Leithwood et al, 2010) that communication and visible presence is key to the role. Critical to principals' success is the ability to quickly build relationships with the school community. From a leadership perspective, they continuously create learning and leadership opportunities for their teachers in order to develop an effective team. All of the principals involved in the study identify the need for self-awareness and reflection. Also essential to their development and success is their relationships with their network of colleagues whom they count on for either practical advice or intense discussions on challenges and successes.

All the principals have identified the need to have a strong vision for the school. They communicate the ability to simplify goals and actions that are data-driven and achievable. Their ability to think differently is apparent. When faced with difficult decisions, they explore multiple options and opinions, consider relationships and welcome the opportunity to create something different- all with the success of the student as the core of the decision.



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“Everyone benefits from fresh milk”

The ability to accept and be a part of a change process is also evident. The initial data suggests that each of these principals recognize that a change in leadership is good for an organization and for their own growth as leaders. One new principal analogized:

I know I did a good job where I was but I think we are kind of like milk- we all have a shelf life. After a while in a building, you get stale or even sour. Everyone benefits from fresh milk.”

Impact and Implications

It is the intent of this study to identify from the data the characteristics of school leaders that have an impact on student achievement. Zaccaro (2012) argues that in order to advance the field of leadership research, researchers will need to derive and test more complex models of how leader individual differences are integrated in their influences on leadership behaviours, processes, and outcomes, in this instance, student achievement.

As an education system, we have become more data-driven. The focus on data is inextricably linked to our vision for success for all students. The school principal is tasked daily- by parents, by teachers and by students- with ensuring that this vision becomes reality. Therefore, it is vital to have a clear identity for school leadership- one that is not based on a list from Twitter or the ramblings of an irate cab driver. If the development and success of our students is data-driven, should the same hold true for our leaders? **CJ**

By: Susan Murray

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“If the development and success of our students is data-driven, should the same hold true for our leaders?”

AUTHOR

Susan Murray (M.Ed, MSc) is a senior leader with the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District and a recipient of Canada's Outstanding Principals Award (2005). She is pursuing doctoral studies at Henley Business School/ Rotman School of Management with a focus on leadership development in both business and education.



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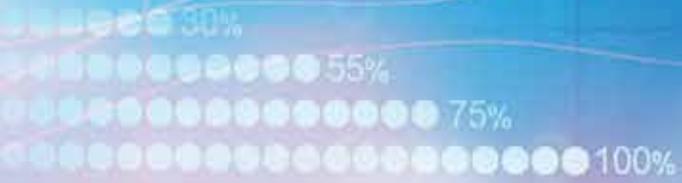
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Digital Reporting & and the Growth of

A Renaissance in Assessment?



Assessment Tools Big Data:

The professional work of teaching and learning has used data and evidence to improve educational decision making for years. Teaching professionals have recognized that data can be mindfully used to empower and generate educational growth and insight. As teachers and principals learn more about their students' individual and collective learning environments, they often become more empowered to implement change and gain a greater sense of efficacy for their professional work. In fact data generated through site-based teacher action research has become a hallmark of many successful education systems around the world, and is resulting in not only an accumulation of information for the learning sciences, but also a deeper knowledge base to feed our collective professional wisdom.

We are now moving into a new era where *digital reporting tools* (eg, PowerSchool, Students Achieve, and Desire2Learn) have increasingly been employed across Canada to gather and analyze student data for the purpose of reporting student progress. It is a time heralded by many global publishing houses and technology companies as a renaissance in assessment where new *digital assessment tools*, under the banner of adaptive learning systems or real-time assessments software (eg, Mathletics, Success Maker, Dreambox Learning Math and Raz-Kids Reading), will serve as interactive teaching or 'personalized' assessment tools for students.

In Alberta, the use of digital reporting and assessment tools has seen dramatic growth over the past decade. Unfortunately teachers and principals have rarely been involved in the selection of the systems, and have not been asked about the value or impact these systems are having on their instruction and assessment practices, work lives or the shifting parental expectations regarding digital reporting. As the recent Canadian Association of Principals (CAP) and Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) national study on the Future of the Principalship in Canada (CAP-ATA, 2014) concludes, the increasing complexity of the classroom, the rise of 'big data' and accountability, and the ubiquity of technology will all profoundly affect the work of teachers and students within the classroom.

In order to better understand this rapidly changing landscape, the ATA, in collaboration with researchers from the University of Alberta, conducted a provincial research study. For the study, the Association surveyed over 1,100 teachers and principals from across urban and rural Alberta about the perceived value and impact of digital reporting and assessment tools on professional practices. The findings are a highly representative voice of Alberta's teaching profession. The data in this 2014 research is the third study conducted by the Association on this subject and carefully charts the consistent and amplifying trends/patterns from research conducted in 2008 and 2011.

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Digital Reporting and Assessment Tools – Key Findings

The following highlights, along with the attached infographic, illustrate the ten key findings from this research study:

Teachers reported that they were generally not confident that digital assessment and reporting tools were improving students' learning.

Teachers viewed digital reporting tools as providing no, or very little, improvement to the level of instruction and assessment in the classroom. In addition, several teachers reported that digital reporting tools have not improved communication with parents or students.

The vast majority of respondents indicated that they were mandated to use digital reporting tools within their classrooms and were not able to provide any feedback as to which tool would be used.

Teachers indicated that digital reporting tools have increased teacher workload, increased parental expectations regarding the frequency of reporting and increased the amount of time required to report student progress.

Participants assigned poor ratings to the professional development and technical support provided for digital reporting tools.

6. Respondents indicated that preparing report cards and individual program plans (IPPs) caused them the greatest amount of stress in the workplace.
7. Most respondents stated that they did not use, or were not planning to use, diagnostic, adaptive and real-time assessment tools in their classrooms or schools.
8. Participants expected to have little to no input in the selection of tools, should their school district implement diagnostic, adaptive and real-time assessment tools.
9. Teachers have a low level of concern with data issues related to digital reporting and assessment.
10. Teachers, through their qualitative comments, demonstrated concern that the implementation of digitally-based resources would put students who had limited access to digital learning tools at a disadvantage compared to students who had families and schools that were well-supported.

Implications

This is an especially timely research study given the recent piloting of Alberta's digital student learning assessments and the Government of Alberta's explicit mandate to shift from print-based to digitally-based resources. The research clearly articulates teachers' and principals' views on a host of factors affecting the future of teaching, including the emergence of new assessment technologies and work intensification.

The data shows that teachers' perceive the value of digital reporting tools as low, while commensurately these tools are having a significantly negative impact on their work life. The explosion of digital assessment and data creation is predicated upon by a management-like accountability (the ability to count) versus engendering greater professional responsibility (the ability to 'respond') to local student, classroom, school and jurisdiction concerns. This is certainly resulting in high costs (both financial and human) for education systems as new accountability regimes are being formed. Principals and teachers must begin to ask the hard questions of digital reporting and assessment tools: What is being counted? Who is giving the account? Why is this being done?

Perhaps of greater concern should be the growing commodification of students, teachers and their data. Individualized and personal data has now become the new raw material for business firms around the world. Many companies are specifically looking to profit from student (and teacher) data that can be easily collected, stored, processed, customized, analyzed, and then ultimately (re) sold. It is a burgeoning global industry where venture capital funds, private equity investors and transnational corporations like Pearson are pouring billions of dollars into education technology companies.

Even Rupert Murdoch, internationally known for the personal wiretapping and hacking scandals of one of his companies, openly articulates an interest in profiting off education: "When it comes to K through 12 education we see a \$500 billion sector in the U.S. alone

that is waiting desperately to be transformed by big breakthroughs... [News Corp.] is at the forefront of individualized, technology-based learning that is poised to revolutionize public education for a new generation of students" (Murdoch, 2010). Children and youth in public education systems should not be treated like automated teller machines or retail loyalty cards from which companies can extract valuable data.

The Seduction of Digital Assessment Tools

So why is this movement so seductive in relation to transforming education? First, it is seen as opening up possibilities for greater access to data that can be used to hyper-individualize learning and in turn diagnose the challenges facing entire school systems. Second, the growing reach and power of technologies, promises to (re)shape students into powerful knowledge workers of the 21st century.

For many publishers and educational technology companies, digital assessment tools (adaptive learning systems) have become a means to 'atomize' students and their data away from the shelter and protection of public education systems. It allows them to create long-term 'personal' relationships with students, so they can market their products over the student's lifetime. Senior publishing executives from McGraw-Hill are not shy about stating their desire to profit off student data: "collecting data, having a student profile that goes from kindergarten through professional [life] is where we want to invest" (Olster, 2013). It also prevents materials from being shared or transferred over time by students as the materials are all digitized and copyright protected. It allows for direct marketing of products and services at any time, place or pace to students or their families.

For teachers, adaptive learning systems are sold as providing easy ways to bump test scores for each and every student, while generating detailed individual student reports through the software's surveillance structures. Companies market their algorithms as not only teaching better, but also freeing up teachers' time and relieving their burdens

DIGITAL REPORTING & ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Evaluating their impact on classrooms



In Alberta, the use of digital reporting tools (eg, PowerSchool, StudentsAchieve and Desire2Learn) and digital assessment tools (eg, Mathletics, SuccessMaker, DreamBox Learning Math and Raz-Kids) has grown dramatically over the past decade. In 2014, the Alberta Teachers' Association and University of Alberta researchers surveyed over 1,100 teachers and principals from across urban and rural Alberta about the perceived value and impact of these digital tools on instruction and assessment practices, teachers' work life and shifting parental expectations.

VALUE

Low Trust in Improving Instruction and Assessment for Students

Have digital reporting tools **improved** the level of instruction and assessment in classrooms?

**Note that this trend line is now consistently moving towards the negative with each study on the subject conducted over the past five years.*



Not Facilitating Communication

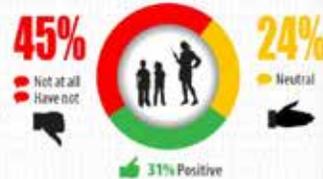
PARENTS

Have digital reporting tools **facilitated** and **improved** communication with parents?



STUDENTS

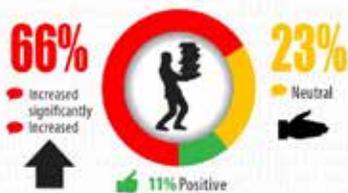
Have digital reporting tools **facilitated** and **improved** communication with students?



IMPACT

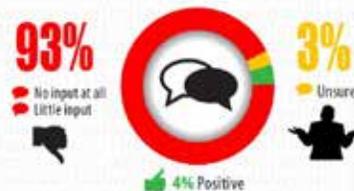
Significant Workload Issues For Teachers

How have digital reporting tools affected **your workload**?



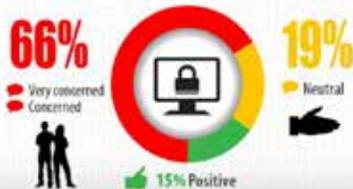
Relatively **No Consultation** or **Input** when Selecting or Implementing Digital Tools

How much input did you have in **choosing** and **implementing** this reporting tool?



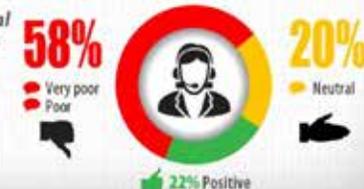
Low Flexibility of the Digital Tools

How do you feel about the **flexibility** of digital tools?



Poor Technical & Professional Development Supports

What sort of **professional development** supports did you receive when initially attempting to learn how to use the digital reporting tool?



in a world of test-based accountability. Just as Pressey (1926) stated almost a century ago, the machine will “make her [teacher] free for those inspirational and thought-stimulating activities which are, presumably, the real function of the teacher” (p. 374).

For parents, this is an extension of the growth in the tutoring movement. It is estimated that one third of Alberta parents now pay for private tutors (ATA, 2011). As the Canadian Council on Learning (2007) found in their national survey, “most parents who hire tutors (73%) estimate that their children’s overall academic performance is in the A or B range”. This is a global obsession, and in 2010 74% of all South Korean students were engaged in some form of private after-school instruction, at an average cost of \$2,600 per student for the year (Ripley, 2011).

Adaptive learning systems are seductive to a North American society, which is reeling from economic volatility and decline. It is a time when the middle class is rapidly shrinking. Parents are obsessively enrolling their children in after-school programs or tutoring with a fanatic devotion to giving their offspring a competitive edge over the pack. Hyper-parents are investing more time, money and energy in their offspring than in previous generations, and adaptive learning systems may be seen as one more tool on the treadmill to Harvard. As Carl Honore (2008) says, “It is not just kids who are under pressure now; it’s parents too. We feel we have to push, polish and protect our offspring with superhuman zeal - or else we’re somehow falling down on the job. We start from the noble and natural instinct to do the best for our kids but end up going too far. Social and cultural pressure drives a lot of this”.

This has resulted in some dramatic consequences for childhood. Since the late 1970s, children have lost 12 hours per week of free time, including a 25% decrease in play and a 50% decrease in unstructured outdoor activities. (Juster et al., 2004). Parents are working longer hours and families are spending less time with their children (Parkland Institute, 2012). The adaptive learning algorithm, wondrously sold as virtual tutor, could also become a convenient digital baby rattle.

For students frustrated with working in a group setting, or having to negotiate the diversity of a public school setting, the teaching machine provides relief. The new teaching machine becomes the panacea for students who are struggling academically or irritated by the pace of learning in schools. Yet, as Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) suggest: “Customized learning is pleasurable and instantly gratifying. Nevertheless it...ultimately becomes just one more process of business-driven training delivered to satisfy individual consumer tastes and desires” (p. 84).

Conclusion

Digital reporting and digital assessment tools are not building more resilient, creative, entrepreneurial or empathetic citizens through their individualized, linear and mechanical software algorithms. Nor are they able to balance the desire for greater choice, in all its manifest forms, with the equity needed for a society to flourish. Many of these digital systems are in fact reductionist and primarily attend to those things that can be easily digitized and tested (math, science and reading). They fundamentally fail to recognize that high quality learning environments are deeply relational, humanistic, creative, socially constructed, active and inquiry-oriented.

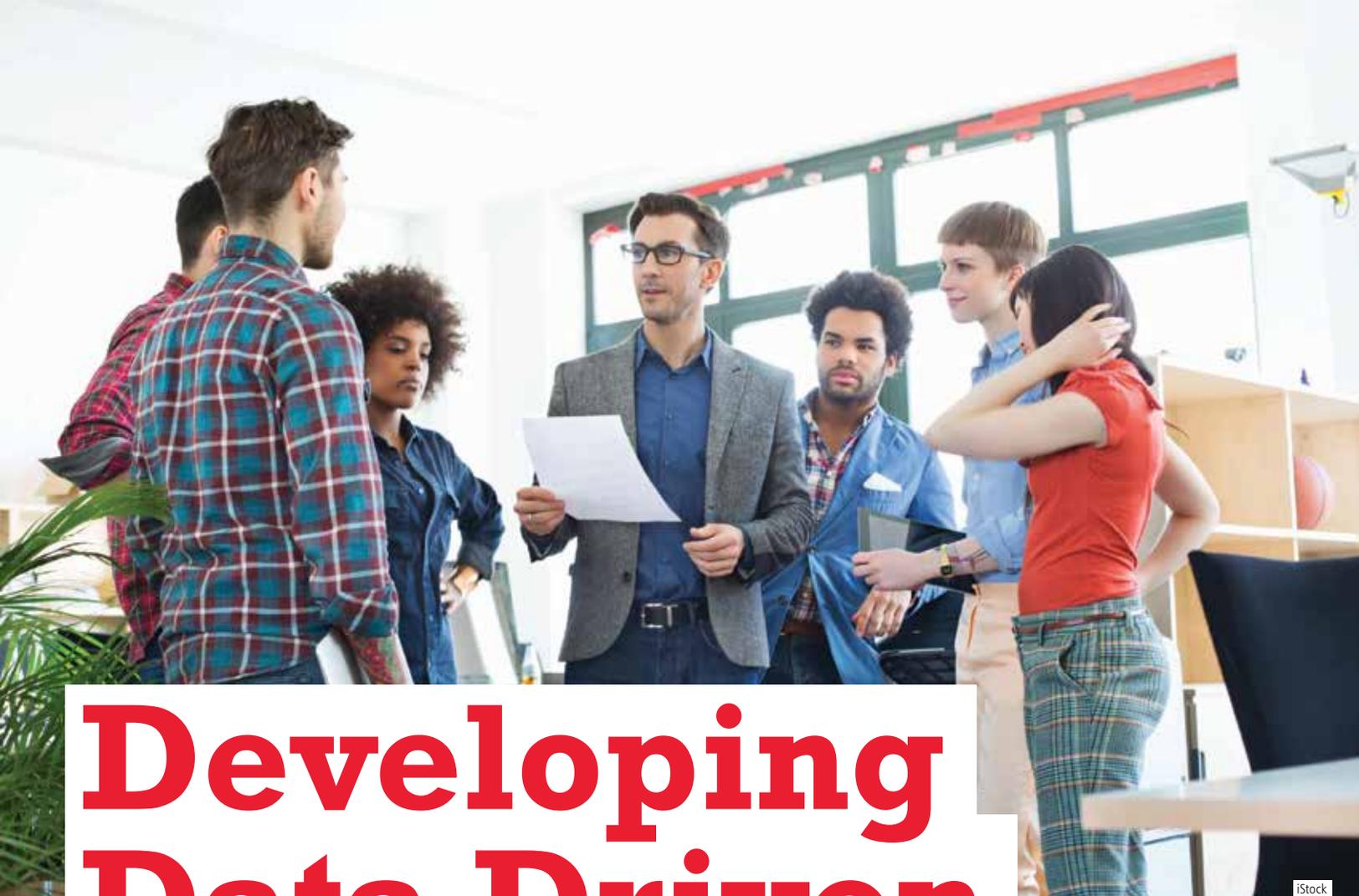
Ironically as more data on student assessments are generated by digital reporting and assessment tools, there is a simultaneous reduction in the number opportunities for deep conversations between parents and teachers. As a society we are becoming obsessed with data quantity, while beginning to fall short on the quality of our human interactions.

It is our work now as teachers and school leaders to (re)focus the attention to fostering creativity, the arts, talent diversity, or interpersonal communicative competencies for students in our schools and school communities, and move away from the growing fixation on increased standardization, centralization and profiteering from this so-called digital renaissance in assessment. CJ

By Dr. Phil McRae

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Developing Data Driven Strategies

How analyzing results, professional dialogue, and targeted teaching strategies can impact student learning.

Jim Collins, in *Great By Choice* (2011), shares a study of public schools that performed well in adverse circumstances. The study is entitled *Beat the Odds*, and found that factors outside a principal's control (class size, length of day, funding, parental involvement) did not distinguish schools, but that there are a set of practical disciplines that schools can control. It states, "Have the strength to look at the problem and take responsibility."; "If students aren't learning, the school needs to change."; "If every student in every classroom isn't learning, the school isn't doing its job" (Pg. 56).

As schools move toward professional learning communities (PLC), the emphasis has changed from "I taught it" to "have they learned it?" Schools know that they must take responsibility for student learning and continually look at what "we" are doing. So how can schools make sure that they are doing their job? We must monitor what we measure and make well-informed decisions.

From Theory to Practice

Our school provincial literacy and numeracy results had flatlined. It was clear that what we were doing within our school community was not working. PLC, as identified by Eaker, DuFour (1998), was introduced. It started with time being given through the week for most subject teachers to meet. Within the literacy and numeracy meetings, my purpose was to provide support and to share the importance of student learning. Teachers started to delve into assessment data to support the learning. Looking at the different measuring instruments as formative information encouraged us to focus on professional dialogue and targeted teaching strategies to ensure each individual student was learning.

Formative assessment provides ongoing feedback and encourages students to monitor their own learning and to achieve curriculum goals. This ownership of student learning became a whole school focus. School decisions included:

- All subject teams providing actions in the School Improvement Plan (SIP) to support the school numeracy and literacy goals.
- Focusing on essential practices for teachers during monthly staff professional learning sessions.
- Using individual formative assessments to ensure learning prior to summative assessments.
- Analyzing provincial and district assessment results in literacy and numeracy.
- Incorporating a Directed Study Block (DSB) into the daily schedule with planned numeracy and literacy interventions based on formative data while other students did a reading program based on R5: *Read, Relax, Reflect, Respond and Rap (2008)*.
- Resource teachers co-teaching and assisting with individual/group interventions.

Literacy

The list of resources used consisted of:

- *Cross-curricular Reading Tools (2007)*
- *Stepping Out (2006)*
- A book series by Gregory/Cameron/Davies, *Self-Assessment and Goal Setting (2011)*
- “Quick Writes” strategy based on research by Kittle/Graves, *Write Beside Them (2008)*
- *Moving Up*
- *Stepping Up*

Data sources used were: classroom individual student assessments; AIMSweb; Ontario Comprehension Assessment (OCA); provincial assessment measuring reading and six writing traits (content-ideas; organization-paragraphing; word choice; voice-personality; sentence structure; conventions-spelling/grammar); district writing screener measuring the same six traits.

The interpretation of all results determined the following actions:

- Interventions during DSB used formative data to target learning for students in the area of reading comprehension and/or the writing process.
- Teachers focused explicitly and modeled to students how to respond to a range of literal, inferential, and critical questions on an on-going basis with a variety of texts.
- Teachers increased and fostered a range of genres through independent and class modeled readings.
- AIMSweb data was used to create Reading Buddies and progress monitor growth.
- A consistent student checklist for the overall writing process was created by the literacy team so students could self-assess and conference with peers, teachers, and parents.
- A consistent teacher’s writing checklist was derived from the literacy team.
- The literacy team created and used a consistent Writer’s Notebook to assist students throughout the overall writing process, with assistance from *Content-Area Writing (2007)* by Daniels/Zemelman/Steineke.
- Teachers began to focus on real world writing connections.

- The literacy team used Anderson’s approach to learning conventions as was found in *Mechanically Inclined (2005)* and *Everyday Editing (2007)*.
- The literacy lead shared the work of Anderson’s *10 things Every Writer Needs to Know (2011)*.

Literacy Results Yielded Increases:

Grade six AIMSweb reading data indicated that benchmarks for fall, winter, and spring were met and that there was a growth rate of 0.7 words per week. The AIMSweb Target Goal for the spring on Words Read Correctly was 161. Our data indicated 165.5 Words Read Correctly, representing an increase of 16.3%.

Grade seven OCA data showed an overall increase of 33% from October to May. This increase was most dramatic in the area of Monitoring Comprehension which increased to an overall success rate of 90% by May.

Grade eight district writing data showed an overall increase of 7.3% more of students at acceptable and above. Conventions and organization were the notable main weaknesses, with sentence structure appearing to be less of an issue. Just over 40% of those students who were not at acceptable and above in the fall writing assessment were at acceptable and above in the district spring assessment.

The provincial results showed mostly a gradual increase in the number of students at acceptable and above, with some dips (fig 1 and 2).

Numeracy

Along with classroom individual student assessment results, provincial large scale assessments measuring six strands (number sense; patterns and relations; shape and space; statistics and probability; mental math; problem solving/communication & knowledge) and district screener assessing number sense were also used.

fig 1

Grade 7 Literacy Assessment (Reading) (Appropriate & Strong Performance)

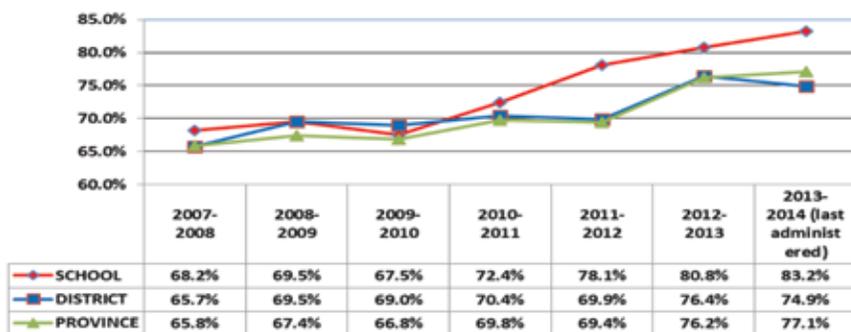


fig 2

Grade 7 Literacy Assessment (Writing) (Appropriate & Strong Performance)

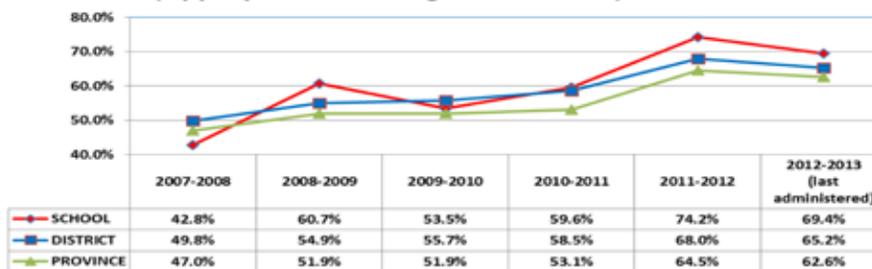


fig 3

Grade 8 Math Assessment (Appropriate + Strong Performance)

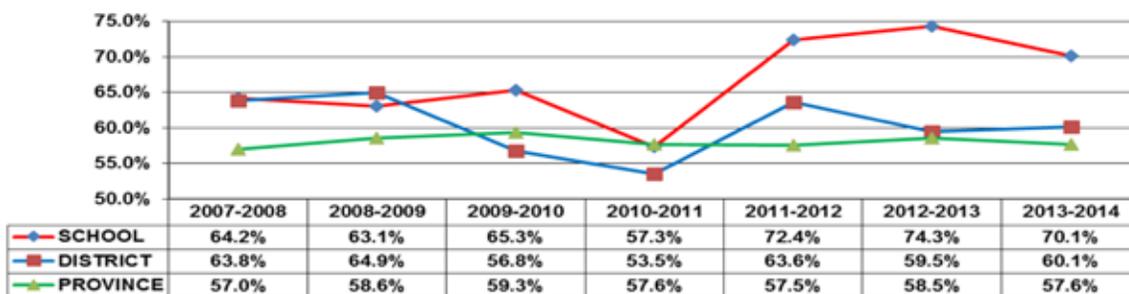
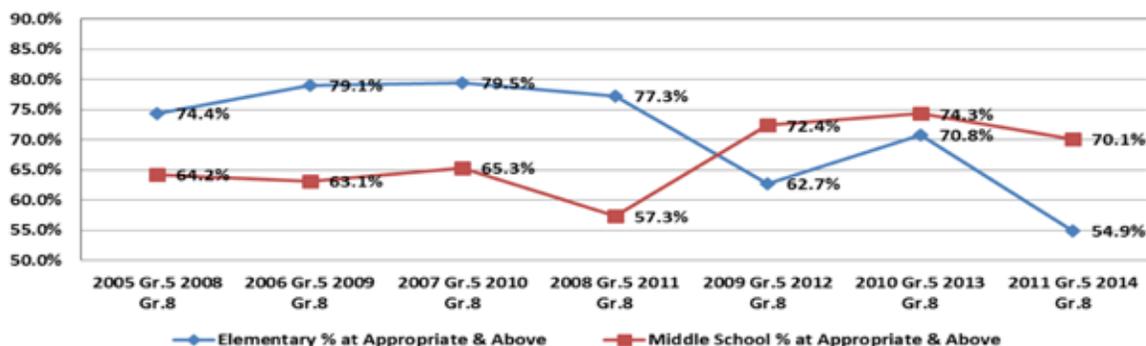


fig 4

Same Student Cohort At Acceptable & Above on Provincial Math Assessment Comparison - Gr. 5 vs. Gr. 8



The interpretation of all results determined the following focus:

- Interventions during DSB were based on screener results on number sense.
- Teachers implemented a scaffold strategy by identifying student level based on formative assessment.
- New math manipulatives and games were created to diversify learning.
- Technology was used by some in the classroom to enhance learning.

Numeracy Results Yielded Increases:

- The 2013-2014 district screener results assessing number sense showed a school percentage increase from the first screener to the end of year screener of 57.75% in grade six, 35.88% in grade seven, and 30.58% in grade eight, with smaller increases due to starting at a higher percentage.
- The provincial results showed mostly a gradual increase in the number of students at acceptable and above, with some dips and notably the comparison of grade five provincial math results to grade eight provincial math results for the same cohort of students showed that eventually more grade eight students were at acceptable and above compared to when those same students were in grade five (fig 3 and 4).

Conclusion

Reality was that it would take many years before PLC's would be totally embraced, defined, or a platform created at schools so in turn it would take time to reap the benefits of a PLC. Even with dips in results, better conversations were happening which required us to reflect on what may have been the reasons for the dips and make changes accordingly, considering many indicators and asking such questions as: How many students were on special education plans in the grade that year?; Was there a change in staff that year?; Was there a program change at any point for those students which might have impacted student performance?; Did the assessment expectations change?; Or Perhaps the large increase in a given year was the anomaly rather than a dip in another year.

We realized that sometimes there may be no clear answers to the change in data; however, having the professional conversations and reflecting on teaching is what is exciting. This became the norm so we are headed in the right direction - looking at all measuring instruments through the eyes of a PLC for school decisions affecting student learning. **CJ**

By: Nancy Matthews

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