

School Improvement Through a Network of Inquiry

Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser

Canadian school improvement, done well, could be described as an intellectual transportation system, linking ideas and people in order to move all learners along a success continuum. With a well-built transportation system, people and goods move efficiently; with a well-constructed school improvement network, smart practices move rapidly.

Our approach to school improvement began with a question: "What will it take for all young people, regardless of family background, to be successful as learners?" The Network of Performance Schools was established in the fall of 1999 to explore this broad question and a series of follow-up questions about school improvement. By January 2002, the Network had grown to include 75 schools from 20 school districts.

Each school team joining the Network generates its own performance questions, which become the action research focus for a year of professional school improvement work. The schools in the Network make an annual commitment to use a case study research approach, focusing on improving learning performance in writing, reading, numeracy / mathematics, or social responsibility.

OUR FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- ✓ The key to a successful network is to develop a sense of team, a commitment to a common goal, and a sense of identity around that goal.
- ✓ The assessment information generated from classroom-based work provides a meaningful basis for both student performance and school improvement data and supports the development of a productive, thoughtful school learning community.
- ✓ Educators in Network schools move rapidly and naturally from a focus on assessment to a focus on instructional improvement.
- ✓ Network schools display a willingness to experiment with new flexible structures which have real potential for improving their capacity.
- ✓ A large professional learning community provides a real audience and purpose for sharing results and promising practices.
- ✓ Working with shared assessment practices and learning to ask more focused questions help build capacity for school change.



We have seen the Network grow organically as schools hear about the work, build on each other's ideas, and encourage innovative practice. We began by comparing school improvement to a transportation system; a better analogy for the Network may be that of a community of connections – linking people, ideas, and promising practices. The Network is based on the dream of connecting school communities to develop successful, powerful, caring, and confident learners of all ages. 📖



For the full text of this article, please visit the CEA website at www.acea.ca/english/publications.phtml. Scroll to the Education Canada section.

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Que faut-il pour que tous les jeunes gens, indépendamment de leurs circonstances familiales, puissent devenir des apprenants qui réussissent ? Le Network of Performance Schools, fondé à l'automne 1999 afin de trouver des réponses à cette question, regroupe désormais 75 écoles en Colombie-Britannique. Chacune élabore ses propres questions au sujet du rendement, lesquelles deviennent le point de mire des efforts d'amélioration pédagogique et professionnelle de la prochaine année scolaire. Pour le texte intégral de cet article (en anglais), consultez le site Web de l'ACE (www.acea.ca).