Strategies to Improve the Literacy Skills of Canadian Children and Youth

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How well do Canadian children fare in their literacy skills?

Literacy Skills in Canada have not improved over the past decade

The recent results provide evidence that reading skills in Canada have reached a plateau.

In 2006, about 40,000 Canadian youth at age 15 had reading literacy skills at or below Level 1.

About 29% of 15-year olds scored at Level 2 or lower.
The ability to read is a fundamental skill for children’s success at school, and ultimately for their long-term health and well-being.

The most critical transition is from learning-to-read to reading-to-learn. For most students this occurs at about age 8 or 9, or about the end of grade 3.
Don’t Wait to Fail

- Literacy trajectories are established early.
- Children on a low trajectory tend to stay on that trajectory and fall further and further behind.
- The later children are identified as needing support, the more difficult it is to catch up.

CRISP Model of Learning

Learning is a function of:
- Quality Instruction
- Productive Engagement
- Enabling Context
- Learning Time
Three Strategies to Improving Literacy Skills

- Value-Added Models (VAM)
- Intervention Effects
- X-Efficiency

Drivers of Learning and Wellness

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**Assessing Value Added**

‘Value-added’ in education refers to the effects of schools and teachers on students’ learning outcomes. In practice, year-to-year gains in students’ test scores are compared to some standard, typically the average test score gains for a jurisdiction, after taking account in some way of students’ family background.

‘Value-added Models’ describe the learning process with a complex set of statistical procedures that attempt to isolate the effects on student outcomes attributable to schooling processes from those due to family influences and other factors outside of the school.
Assessing the effects of interventions

Data can be used to assess the effects of district, school and classroom interventions.

We can consider five types of interventions for raising and levelling the learning bar.
Informing a Dialogue about X-Efficiency

Harvey Leibenstein argues that changing organisational dimensions of the firm were more effective in increasing productivity than the allocation of inputs at the margin.

His ideas underlie Henry Levin’s model for Accelerated Schools.

The *function* or core activity of schools is **learning and wellness**, while the *form* or structural features of schools are those elements of schooling that support the core activity.
Key attributes of Professional Learning Communities

- Shared values and norms
- Clear and relentless focus on student learning
- Working collaboratively
- Accountability based on results
Effect a shift in school and district policy away from day-to-day operations to the core activities of teaching and learning.

Focus on factors that are proximal to the teaching-learning process:
- improving quality of teaching by supporting collaborative teaching models
- increasing student engagement
- developing and supporting augmentative programs to increase learning time
- intentionally supporting inclusive practices
- focus accountability on clear transparent markers of students’ success based on continuous assessment

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- Productive Engagement
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First Steps
Examine gradients and school profiles for the district and for individual schools

Develop some simple measures of success that emphasize the transition from learning-to-read to reading-to-learn

Establish a district PD framework to create the 'special forces' team of teachers skilled in improving literacy

Support the development of a system of leading indicators that can inform school policy and instructional decisions and increase student engagement in learning.

Develop a strategy for increasing learning time with:
- after-school programs
- making the most of June
- summer learning