



MAINE CTE PROMISING PRACTICES MINI CASE STUDY
Region 11 Oxford Hills Technical School
Norway, ME
Director: Dave Mason

PROMISING PRACTICE: Use of Literacy Strategies Across Academic and Technical Classes

“Professional development days are planned for Wednesdays once per month. Six of these were missed this past year due to weather or other reasons, like in October when there was no water. Even though we did not get to do the literacy professional development as planned, when Jane and I went around to do observations, we were extremely encouraged by the amount of literacy we saw.”

Oxford Hills Technical School is in the second year of a focus on literacy integration into CTE technical classes.

During the 2006–07 school year, three CTE literacy mentors trained the spring before led monthly workshops back at Oxford Hills Technical School. They shared before, during, and after reading strategies, gave some examples, and asked other instructors to try them out. Four other instructors attended literacy workshops. All Oxford Hills Technical School instructors knew that the monthly staff meeting was going to focus on literacy strategies so this was a part of the schedule, “not another meeting.” Then teachers using the strategies would put on a demonstration so other teachers could see how they used it with students. There was also some accountability, too; Mason said he and the student services coordinator learned the best practices from the mentors and went right to instructors’ classrooms and said “show us what you’re using.”

During the 2007–08 school year professional development sessions were cancelled frequently. Two of the three mentors who had participated in the state-wide CTE Literacy Mentor Program the year before left the technical school to teach at Central Maine Community College. The director was out on extended medical leave. But three people did attend the CTE literacy workshops this year. And across technical classes, instructors continued to integrate some of the literacy support strategies they had learned the previous year into their instruction. Mason and the student services coordinator, Jane Munn, also offer to cover classes so teachers can get into one another’s classes to observe. Having two instructors in some of the programs also makes peer observation easier to do.

Mason says that the students are starting to comment on the fact that they are seeing the same literacy strategies used across technical and academic classes. Both sending schools have an active literacy improvement initiative underway. According to Mason, “More and more teachers are incorporating the literacy strategies...it doesn’t matter the discipline, they are much the same strategies being used. The kids are seeing that pattern straight across and I think that’s going to help more and more.”

Mason notes that some of the programs, like early childhood, make use of the literacy support strategies very explicit as to why they are being used, etc. while others, for example building trades, embed the strategies directly into teaching and learning in the classroom and the shop without alerting the students. There is a big emphasis on vocabulary and Word Walls are used by most programs. Critical thinking is also being stressed; for example, “If you had a certain roof pitch, what is the length of the rafters?”

What difference is it making?

Mason says that the instruction is “different than before”; that before teachers “did not make such a conscious effort to stress technical terms and words.” “Jeopardy is very popular — both for vocabulary and questions...we see it in business education, CAD, marketing, building trades...teachers make crossword puzzles...Word Walls...Before teachers would assign the chapter and then discuss it the following day but the students wouldn’t really read it a lot of the time. Now they go through the chapter and find terms and tell what they mean and give definitions in their own words and use it in a sentence so

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by the time they read the chapter, they have heard those terms and definitions several times...they put the words and the definitions up on the wall.”

But as of now they have “no hard data” to support the work, although Mason says that teachers feel that while they can’t say definitely it helps students to be better readers, “it certainly doesn’t hurt to have them go through this.” Some teachers say that they are noticing that the students know the terms better and that this makes it easier in the shop. Others note that by using the strategies, the kids are doing the work instead of them.

One thing Mason notes is how positively teachers responded to the professional development on all levels. Instructors were interested in going to the workshops — instructors in more than half of the 17 program areas have attended either mentor training or the literacy workshops and everyone participated in Year 1 at the staff meetings. Teachers said it takes a bit more time but students learn the terms better. “I’ve never seen such a positive response to professional development. Most times you bring up professional development and they cringe. This has gotten a positive response and they’re doing things in their classrooms they were not doing previously; they’re incorporating it into their curriculum.”

Next steps:

- ✓ Help teachers understand the NWEA data better. The school tests the students in grades 11 and 12 and gets sending school scores from grades 9 and 10, but the teachers need some professional development on how to read the reports
- ✓ Refocus staff meeting time on using the literacy strategies as effectively as possible. Discuss which strategies support students to interact with reading and writing or to learn technical terms. Continue to release teachers and encourage them to observe use of specific strategies in one another’s classrooms
- ✓ Having students do more reading and writing — getting trade magazines in and having them read those and report back to the class
- ✓ Integrate a similar focus on numeracy

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