Exceptional News!

Student Support Services Division
Department of Education

Newsletter

November 2009

Revisions to Exceptionalities

The department's outlines of exceptionalities have been revised in order to:

- develop more concise, clear working definitions
- use terminology consistent with current literature and practice
- reduce confusion where overlaps were frequently found

These changes were communicated to the districts during the summer and are on the department's website at www.gov.nl.ca/edu/k12/studentsupportservices/exceptionalities.html.
They are also reflected on the Annual General Return and the Referral Tracking System (RTS).

Newfoundland Labrador
Department of Education
Referral Tracking System

Provincial Rollout

The Referral Tracking System was successfully piloted in 16 schools during the 2008-2009 school year and is currently being implemented throughout the province. The RTS is an electronic database which tracks all aspects of the assessment referral process in Newfoundland and Labrador schools. It is designed to provide real-time data on current, completed and waitlisted referrals for assessment and is accessed through a web-based application. All assessors, including guidance counsellors, special education teachers, speech language pathologists and educational psychologists, enter anonymous data using a referral tracking number (RTS#) assigned by the SST (Student Support Services Team) to each student requiring an assessment.

Phase 1 of this project involved registering all 279 school principals (or designate) and was completed by mid-October 2009. Phase 2 required these principals to approve the registration of all assessors (guidance counsellors, speech language pathologists, etc.) who conduct assessments of students in their schools. Phase 3 will see lead teachers from the student support services teams assigning an RTS# to all current and waitlisted referrals, as well as any new referrals made during the 2009-2010 school year. Finally in Phase 4, professionals involved in assessing students will enter the title of any instruments used, date of assessment, final report date and identified exceptionality, where applicable, into RTS. By the end of the school year, all schools should have their assessment records up to date. The data will help inform programming decisions at the school level and provide relevant real-time data to district and department officials.
Training sessions have been planned for all principals, guidance counsellors, educational psychologists, speech language pathologists and special education teachers. These training sessions will be conducted across the province through a variety of means: on-site PD, online sessions using *Elluminate Live* and web-based training videos. Approximately 800-1000 teachers are involved in this project and training is expected to continue into December 2009.

The RTS site can be found at: http://eduservices.gov.nl.ca/referrals. It utilizes a high level of security to protect the data and users of the system, while containing no identifying information about students. A support webpage with Q&As, user guides and support videos can be found at http://www.gov.nl.ca/edu/k12/studentsupportservices/rts/index.html.

The department has also revised all referral forms, as well as the parent consent form, to streamline the process and ensure that accurate paper records are completed and stored in the student file. Forms are available at: http://www.gov.nl.ca/edu/forms/studentsupport/referral.html.

Update on Inclusion

The focus for pilot and partner schools this year is on collaborative teaching models. The department has partnered with Newfoundland and Labrador Association for Community Living to provide two days of professional learning for special education teachers from pilot/partner schools. Accompanying each special educator will be a classroom or subject teacher with whom he or she collaborates. These teacher teams will examine various models of service delivery and determine what might be most suitable for their particular classrooms. Training has been completed for pilot and partner schools in Labrador school district and will continue throughout the province until the end of February.

Alternate Format Materials and Assistive Technology

Many students with exceptionalities rely upon alternate format materials and assistive technology in order to access the curriculum. The Department of Education has been reviewing how these services are delivered in order to identify areas for improvement.

Alternate Format Materials

Several improvements to the delivery of alternate format materials are underway. A new digital repository of alternate format materials is near completion. This repository will replace the current alternate format materials website. The date for the transition to the new repository is not yet finalized, and will be determined in collaboration with district personnel to ensure a smooth transition.

The new system will contain a *browse catalogue* feature which will allow users to peruse the resources that the department has available in alternate formats. This should help teachers with the alternate format application process. In addition, students will be assigned unique usernames and passwords and, upon login, will be presented only with the specific materials that have been requested by the school on the student's behalf.

The department is still working to improve the quantity and quality of material available in alternate formats. To this end, we are in the process of hiring a librarian to help further develop and manage the alternate format materials library.

The new system is more aligned with copyright legislation and will hopefully prove to be more user friendly for students and teachers alike.

The Department of Education is also developing a learning centre to accompany the alternate format materials digital repository. The learning centre will contain videos and *Captivate* presentations which explain how to use the digital repository, eligibility to receive alternate format materials, copyright legislation and the application process.

Assistive Technology

The Department of Education personnel and teachers have reviewed and evaluated specific software and devices for classroom use. Requests for *Kurzweil 3000* Web Licenses, French and English *SpeakQ/Word Q* licenses and *Fusions* have been filled. In addition, all K-12 schools have been provided *Inspiration* software. The department is in the process of hiring a consultant in assistive technology to support and develop this area.

Differentiated Instruction (DI)

Clock Buddies

Want to save time in creating partners and groups?

Clock buddies is a quick and easy way to create pairs for partnered activities while avoiding the problem of students repeatedly working with the same groups. It is also a great way to structure movement about the classroom under the teacher's direction.

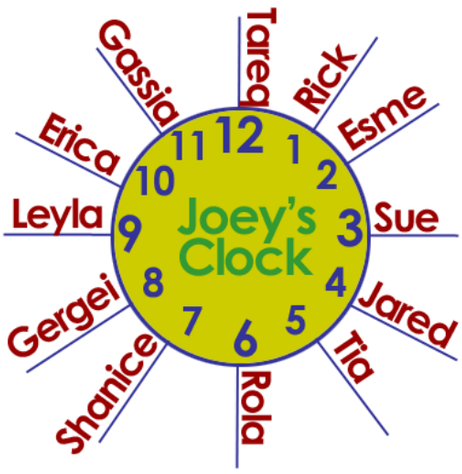
Areas in which to use this strategy:

- Working on math problems
- Answering questions in social studies or science
- Role-playing during language arts
- Completing art projects
- Paired-reading
- Recess buddies
- Completing classroom chores

Clock buddies are chosen by giving each student a clock handout with a blank line next to each hour. Each student then goes to various classmates in turn to find a buddy for each hour. For example, if Mike goes to Joe, Joe signs Mike's clock at 2 pm and Mike signs Joe's clock for the same time.

Each student may appear only once on each card and all hours must be filled in. The clocks are then attached to the inside cover of their notebook or workbook. When you want students to work with a

buddy, you call out a particular time, for example, "It's time to work with your _____ o'clock buddy." Students will then partner with the buddy whose name is at the specified time slot.



For a copy of the clock handout, visit www.readingquest.org/pdf/clock_buddies.pdf.

Another version of this strategy which sometimes appeals to older learners is to use an *appointment card* instead of a clock face. Pairs have each other in corresponding time slots of their cards.

Exit Cards

Exit cards are quick assessment tools which can be used by teachers to help them become more aware of a student's understanding of concepts taught. They may be used at every grade level and subject area and can be general or specific, depending on the desired learning outcome. Students respond to a question that is posed by the teacher at the end of class or a lesson.

Process:

- Distribute an exit card to each student prior to the end of class.
- Students write their names on their cards.
- The teacher poses a question to which students respond. The question must be short and should take the students a maximum of 5 minutes to complete.
- As the students leave the classroom, they drop their exit cards into a container or hand them to the teacher.

Essentially the Exit Card is a ticket to leave or it may be called a 'ticket out.' In primary/elementary classes, the students would simply hand it in to the teacher.

Using the responses on the exit cards, the teacher can better assess student learning in order to differentiate the instruction and activities to accommodate students' needs for a future session.

These may also be used prior to beginning a new area of instruction in order to pre-assess the students' prior knowledge or experience with the topic. This would aid in the development and planning of a new area of study.

The type of question posed by the teacher depends on what kind of response they are looking for from their students. The question could ask for a skill to be demonstrated, a concept explained, an objective understood, or even a perception check of students' feelings.

General Examples:

1. Write one question that you still have about today's topic/lesson.
2. What are the three things that you learned today?

Specific Examples:

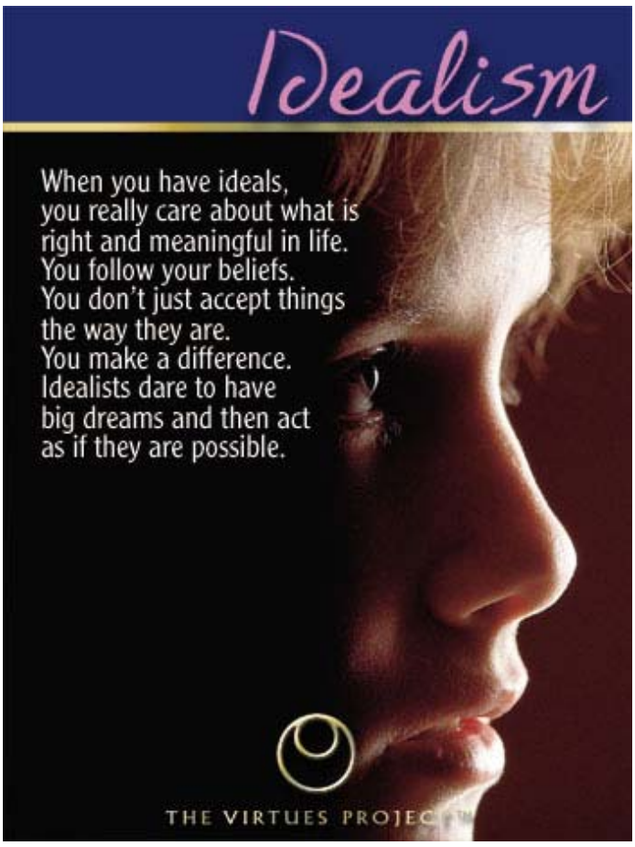
1. Explain the difference between simile and metaphor.
2. Explain or draw your understanding of photosynthesis.
3. Multiply 3.45 x 2.6
4. List 3 chores for which native women were responsible.

Exit Card Example
3 things you know about the water cycle
2 things that connected for you
1 question you still have

Safe and Caring Schools
Special Project Awards

The Provincial Safe and Caring Schools Advisory Committee will award 30 prizes of $500 for special projects that promote safe and caring schools in your school or community. The contest is open to student groups, school groups and district initiatives. Applications and further information are available through your district office or on the Department of Education website at www.gov.nl.ca/edu/.

Deadline for applications is December 7, 2009



Safe and Caring Schools

The purpose of the *Virtues Project* is to develop a culture where respect, patience, self-discipline, tolerance and joy for learning are among the virtues our students master. The goal of the *Virtues Project* is to help us to live more purposeful lives, to raise children of integrity and compassion, to develop a culture of character in our schools, and inspire excellence and service in the workplace. These strategies build foundations for safe and caring communities.

For more information on the Virtues Project go to:
www.virtuesproject.com/index.html
or contact Bernie Ottenheimer, Safe and Caring Schools consultant bernieottenheimer@gov.nl.ca

Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) Training

The Department of Education recently supported 36 speech-language pathologists and special education teachers from around the province to attend intense two-day training in the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS). The training was presented by the developers of this system, Pyramid Educational Consultants, on October 26 and 27. Participants left the workshop with an understanding of how to implement PECS with individuals with autism, related developmental disabilities, and/or limited communication skills. All speech-language pathologists in the K-12 system either already had this training or were recently provided the opportunity to receive it. To further build capacity in school districts, the special education teachers who attended this training, as well as the speech-language pathologists, can now assist other teachers in the use of this system.

Feedback

Please share your thoughts regarding this newsletter including any suggestions for future articles. Our hope is to facilitate better communication with student support services teams throughout the province.

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