

MERGE Leads Students Down the Road to Success

Matthew Elementary School in Bonavista, which serves Grades K-7, is the largest elementary school in Vista School District. In an effort to increase language arts achievement levels at the school, the Matthew Elementary Reading Group for Excellence (MERGE) program was established in the 2001-02 school year.

The purpose of MERGE is to enable teachers at Matthew Elementary to become the best reading teachers they can be by researching

best practices in reading instruction, and by learning from each other how to implement these practices to raise the academic achievement of students. The MERGE group is a highly-focused and enduring professional development experience. There are no “power relationships”, as educators operate from the premise of working with, and learning from, one another. Group members celebrate achievements and successes along the way and find that the meaningful dialogue amongst colleagues leads to more effective teaching.

Outlining the Mission

At the beginning of the project the primary and special needs teachers, including the challenging needs teacher, met to work towards the achievement of their mission.

A number of aspects of teaching reading were selected for specific attention:

- an examination of the place of guided reading within a balanced literacy program;
- the use of running records to assess and guide reading;
- grouping and regrouping of children;
- matching books and readers;
- teaching students to use effective reading strategies;
- classroom management during guided reading;
- organizing for instruction;
- record keeping;
- *First Steps* resources; and
- provincial curriculum documents.

Discussions led to the introduction of a two-hour block of uninterrupted literacy instruction for the primary division. To do this it was necessary to overcome significant scheduling challenges to provide for physical education and music classes for primary as well as elementary students.

The MERGE project has had a positive impact on student learning. Provincial Criterion-Referenced Test (CRT) scores for primary English language arts demonstrate definite growth trends. Primary teachers report increased satisfaction with the teaching and learning of English language arts in their

classrooms and say the two-hour block allows for meaningful introduction and follow-through of language arts activities.

A future goal is to establish a similar group for teachers in the elementary/intermediate division at Matthew Elementary. The school has seen the benefits of collaboration in the primary grades and is confident there would be similar rewards for elementary/intermediate teachers and students.

District 8 Profile

	2003-04	2002-03
Schools	15	15
Students	3971	4081
Teachers	312.0	313.9
Pupil-Teacher Ratio	12.3	12.6