

Grade 10 Applied Level Boys' Mentoring and Literacy Project

Completed by: Durham District School Board



Eastdale Collegiate and Vocational Institute

NAME	POSITION	CONTACT
Myfanwy Charles	Project Lead, English Head, Literacy Chair	charles_myfanwy@durham.edu.on.ca
Connie White	Vice Principal	white_connie@durham.edu.on.ca
Kimberly Tate	Teacher, U.O.I.T. Faculty of Education Liaison, Mentor	tate_kimberly@durham.edu.on.ca
Stephanie Wade	Teacher, Data Analysis, Mentor	wade_stephanieAnn@durham.edu.on.ca
Marc Korsmit	Teacher, Mentor	korsmit_marc@durham.edu.on.ca
Susan Burford	Special Education Head	burford_susan@durham.edu.on.ca
Janette Hughes	Assistant Professor, U.O.I.T. Faculty of Education, Mentor	Janette.hughes@uoit.ca



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Essential Question:

Would one-on-one literacy support from caring adults have an impact on the overall confidence and literacy skill development of grade 10 applied level boys and, subsequently, improve their success rates on the OSSLT?

Background:

Past OSSLT scores have clearly indicated that applied level boys struggle with the literacy tasks on the OSSLT and, subsequently, statistically perform poorly in comparison to their academic and/or female counterparts. It was evident that our focus needed to be on increasing these students' confidence going in to the test by relationship building and skills enhancement. These boys had experienced (first semester) or were experiencing (second semester) significant literacy skills practice in their English classes including completing a "mock test"; our intention was to build on this momentum with a series of individual mentoring sessions, each focusing on a specific literacy task/strategy, over a period of weeks leading up to the OSSLT. The MISA funding made it possible for us to provide teacher release time (two full periods per teacher) to provide mentoring to one or two applied level boys outside of their regular classroom setting.

Data Collection Methods and Analysis:

The implementation of this project began in November 2008 with a strategy session to determine:

- A) Who would participate in the mentoring sessions (mentor and student selection, pairing principle, etc.)?
- B) What would these sessions look like (content/format), and how many sessions would be effective/manageable for both mentors and students (duration? series of full periods? half periods, etc.)?
- C) Where would these sessions take place (in a school bursting at the seams!)?
- D) How would we get the information about the project out to parents and students?

Our plan in action:

A) Because we wanted to target our grade 10 applied level boys, our guidance department printed up a list of male students based on enrollment in a first or second semester ENG2P1 course (subsequently, as indicated in our stats, we did have a handful of PE unsuccessful male students in the mix). There were almost 100 names on the list. Thus, due to the size of our target group, it was clear that a one-to-one ratio of mentor to student would not be manageable, so we decided to “pair up” students with teacher volunteers (we had explained the project to our teachers at the January staff meeting and requested volunteers at that time) and “volunteer” our Queens’ teacher-candidates as mentors also. We also extended our reach outside the school and initiated a mentoring relationship with U.O.I.T. English teacher-candidates (See “Reflections and Action”). **The result: 22 Eastdale staff volunteers (including our principal), 12 U.O.I.T teacher-candidates (including the professor), and 7 Queens teacher-candidates, for a total of 41 mentors.**

To create meaningful mentor-students relationships, we asked each Eastdale teacher mentor to select two students with whom he/she would like to work. We encouraged staff to pick students with whom they already had a positive working relationship/rapport. Some teachers were unfamiliar with the students on the list, so we randomly created mentor-student partnerships -- with some surprising results (see “Results and Findings”). We “hand-selected” students to work with our U.O.I.T. teacher-candidates as these volunteers were “off site” and coming in to the school on specific dates to meet with their students (we wanted to make sure the students were solid “attenders” and would be present for the mentoring sessions!) Our Queens teacher-candidates were randomly assigned students from the remaining pool (chronic “non-attenders” on the list were not included in the mentoring project for obvious reasons). **In all, 75 students participated.** By the end of the project, for a variety of reasons (mostly due to spotty student attendance) some mentors had worked consistently with two students while other mentors had worked with only one.

In late January we held two mentoring information sessions: an after school in-service for Eastdale volunteers to go over the project expectations, session format, and literacy modules, and an information session for the U.O.I.T. teacher-candidates at their Simcoe and King campus to outline the project. The Queens teacher-candidates (who had been “forewarned” of their involvement at their first placement with us in November) were in-serviced at the school two days before their mentoring sessions began.

B) Because the intention of the mentoring project was to promote/enhance students literacy skills and confidence, the sessions needed to focus on specific literacy skills and strategies while ensuring that a “non-English” teacher could feel comfortable communicating the content (our staff volunteers came from every department in the school and our Queens teacher-candidates from a variety of disciplines). The result was the creation of a series of five “literacy modules” to be delivered in 5 mentoring sessions of approximately 35 minutes (half a period) in length*. The half period blended the 5 sessions with the funded two full period release time for mentors (each mentor volunteered half a prep period to make up the additional half period required to deliver the entire project). Each module had mentor notes (explaining the rationale and expectations of the session to both mentor and student) and an interactive teaching

component: questionnaire, cloze activity, exemplars with questions, organizers, etc. The sessions were as follows:

Session One: "Getting to Know You"

- reading, writing, and general interest surveys
- attitudes toward literacy and the OSSLT
- shared goals of the mentoring project

Session Two: "News report"

- "real" news article sample
- OSSLT news report structure and content requirement
- sample task and exemplars

Session Three: "Reading Strategies"

- what effective readers do
- strategies for OSSLT reading tasks: graphic, narrative, dialogue, information
- types of questions: explicit, implicit and making connections
- multiple choice strategies and open response exemplars

Session Four: "Short Writing Task"

- SEEEC format/organizer
- topic development and use of conventions
- sample task and exemplars

Session Five: "Series of Paragraphs Expressing an Opinion"

- planning, structure, and content
- sample task and exemplar
- anecdotal survey "How do you feel about the OSSLT now?"

(*The U.O.I.T. teacher-candidates modified the order and content of some of these modules as part of their course requirement.)

The schedule and delivery of these sessions varied depending on the mentors' needs. For example, while most Eastdale teacher-mentors met on 5 separate occasions for half a period over six weeks (some mentors had to combine sessions to accommodate student absences), the U.O.I.T. teacher-candidates had 4 one hour long sessions twice a week for two weeks (to accommodate their other course requirements and practicum placement dates). Our Queens teacher-candidates had 4 sessions scheduled at weekly intervals to accommodate their placement period at Eastdale (they combined Sessions One and Two).

The 5 "half period" sessions were problematic for arranging supply coverage, so the solution was to have our teacher-mentors use half of their prep periods over 6 weeks for the mentoring sessions and then access their half day supply coverage, at their convenience, at the end of the project (after the OSSLT).

The "feel good" component of the mentoring sessions was enhanced with cookies and juice for all participants in the first session, and treats provided at subsequent sessions (funding provided by our principal, not MISA!)

C) Finally, this project required that 41 mentors meet in a quiet setting outside of the students' classroom (at different times of the day depending on the mentor's prep period). At the time of the project, Eastdale was utilizing every classroom in the school and 21 portables! Suffice it to say, space was at a premium! Thanks to an extremely supportive and accommodating teacher-librarian, we were able to book the library for 5 full days (at about 10 to 12 day intervals beginning in the first week of February) for our staff-student mentoring and four half days (2 half days per week for two weeks beginning in the first week of February approximately) for our U.O.I.T. mentors. Our Queens teacher-candidates also met with their students in the library but, due to fewer participants and greater latitude with session times, they did not require reserved library booking.

D) To get the word out about the project to participating students and their parents, we distributed a letter to grade 10 homerooms at the beginning of the semester and held an information assembly in the first week of February. Homeroom teachers were given the list of participating students and were asked to send the appropriate students to the auditorium for a brief assembly. At that time the vice principal overseeing the project and the literacy chair spoke to the students about the goals of the project and what they could anticipate in the coming weeks (see "Results and Findings").

All the mentors received the timetables of their assigned student(s) and on the assigned MISA day went to the student(s) classroom(s) or called him/them out of class to the library. Students were then re-admitted to class with a slip at the end of the sessions. Therefore, it was important that grade 10 teachers be accommodating and flexible on these occasions.

Results and Findings:

The results of our project were significant both quantitatively as indicated in our improved OSSLT scores for the target group, and qualitatively in our participants' positive attitudes leading up to, during, and after the OSSLT.

Quantitatively, we saw an improvement of 15% in our applied level results. 75% of our applied level students were successful in the 2009 OSSLT compared to only 60% in 2008. Similarly, 82% of our male students were successful in the 2009 OSSLT compared to only 73% in 2008. The attached charts provide statistical data around participation in the sessions and corresponding student success rates. It was interesting to note that of the 16 FTE unsuccessful MISA participants, over half of those students were what we have termed "heart breakers" due to scores of 290 - 295. We have interpreted this data to suggest that even our unsuccessful students may have benefited from the additional literacy support as the margin of failure had been generally wider in the previous year's OSSLT.

Qualitatively, we saw a positive change in student and teacher attitudes towards the test and an overall improvement in teacher-student interaction. For example, one teacher whose focus was usually the senior college or university level student had been "assigned" a student with whom he was unfamiliar (an identified student who was

known to be “challenging” and difficult to reach). A remarkable connection developed between these two unlikely individuals, prompting the teacher to volunteer to scribe for the student during the test. Similarly, a number of our teacher mentors working with identified students specifically volunteered to scribe for their students. Their students’ success had truly become a shared goal. The students felt empowered knowing that they had a teacher “on their side”. One staff member, observing the mentoring sessions in the library, commented on the general sense of good-will and harmony of the interactions. Later, when the OSSLT results were released, the mentors were eager to know how their students had done. The mentors celebrated their students’ successes and felt genuinely saddened for those who were not successful.

The attitudes of the students who participated in the mentoring project also changed. The response from the students at the initial information session in February had been fairly negative. The male students had felt “singled” out (as indeed they were) and resented their participation in a project that, from their perspective, suggested they were “inferior” to their female classmates. The vice principal and literacy chair attempted to convince these boys that this was actually a great opportunity and that they were really lucky to have been chosen, and the impact of the project on their success on the test and on their overall literacy skills would be considerable... the message was not particularly well received at that time. However, despite the negativity voiced at the large group session, once these boys met with their mentors, a remarkable transformation occurred and was clearly visible when one observed the sessions. One on one, with a teacher/teacher-candidate giving them their undivided attention, the boys could not and did not “buy out” of the process. They were involved and, for the most part, engaged. They knew that their mentors were invested in them and their success, and they responded in kind. It was a beautiful thing to watch.

Ergo, the results and findings of Eastdale’s “Grade 10 Applied Level Boys’ Mentoring and Literacy Project” clearly indicate that one-on-one literacy support from caring adults does indeed have an impact on the overall confidence and literacy skill development of grade 10 applied level boys and, subsequently, improves their success rates on the OSSLT.

Reflections and Action:

While another mentoring project of this scale is unlikely in the near future (as there is no guarantee there will be MISA funds to support a continuation of the project), the value of this one-to-one focused support is inarguable. Thus, we hope to continue the project in a more abbreviated form in the coming school year. An extremely positive outcome of the recruitment of mentor-volunteers was the development of Eastdale’s relationship with U.O.I.T.’s Faculty of Education: the professor describing the mentoring partnership with Eastdale as “a highlight” of her programme. Both parties have already been in discussion about a similar mentoring partnership for next year. This time the focus may be less ambitious in scope and more flexible with regards to target group: i.e. any students at-risk of being unsuccessful on the OSSLT (F.T.E. or P.E., male or

female). Likewise, a number of our staff mentors commented on the value of the project and indicated that they would be interested in volunteering again next year, even if release time was unavailable... Due to the imposition on their time, this would necessitate fewer sessions individualized to the specific needs of the student. We also hope to continue to utilize our Queens teacher-candidates as mentors, as this year's teacher candidates recognized what an invaluable asset this form of cross-curricular literacy experience would be for their future employment opportunities. We are also considering building mentoring partnerships between our grade 12 university level students and "at-risk" students in grades 9 and 10 through the ENG4U1 programme. Thus, there are a variety of possible permutations that will accommodate some form of continued mentoring project within the school in the coming year(s).

Contributions to MISA Professional Network Centre:

The information gathered from the data and from anecdotal teacher and student responses/reactions indicates the importance of relationship building and teacher-student interaction as an essential part of learning.

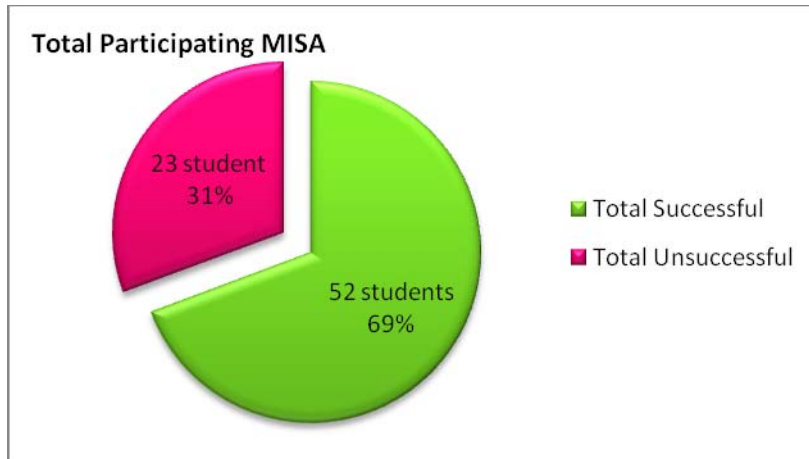
Suggestions for Future Research:

While the target of this project was specifically applied level boys and improved OSSLT results, clearly there is a value in building one-on-one relationships with any struggling student in any academic area. For example, research could be undertaken to see if numeracy mentoring, over a sustained period, could also have measurable quantitative and qualitative results.

Data Analysis

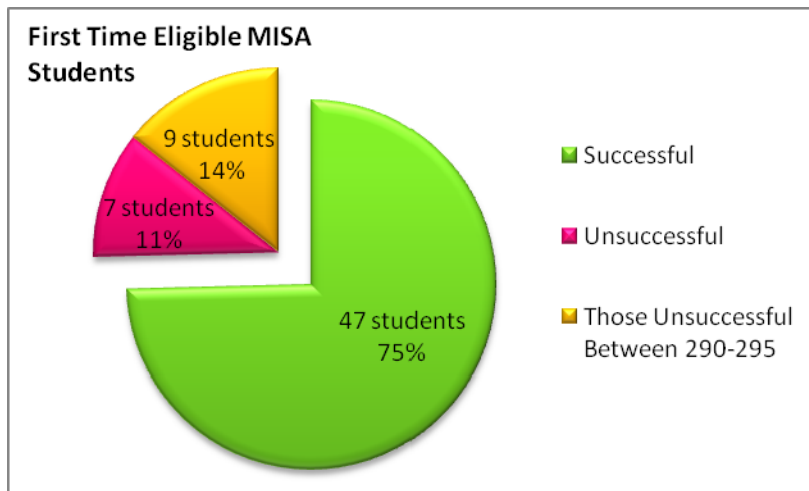
Total Participating MISA students:

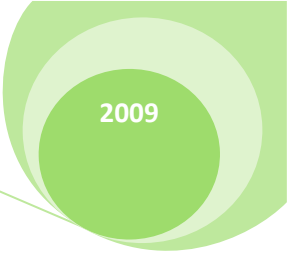
Total	75	100%
Successful	52	69%
Unsuccessful	23	31%



First Time Eligible

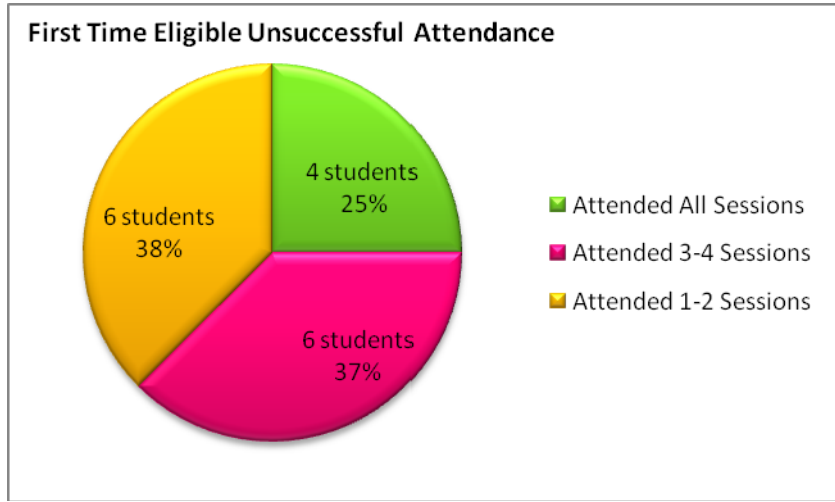
Total	62	100%
Successful	47	76%
Unsuccessful	16	24%
Those Unsuccessful Between 290-295	9	56%





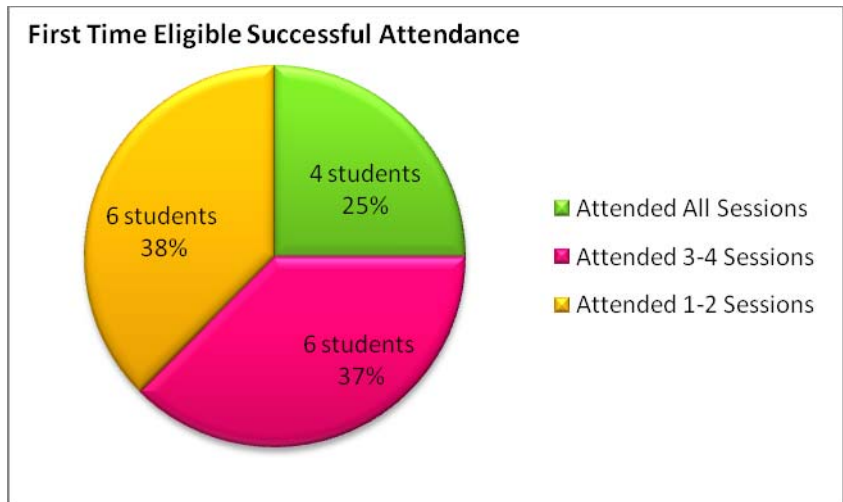
First Time Eligible Unsuccessful Attendance

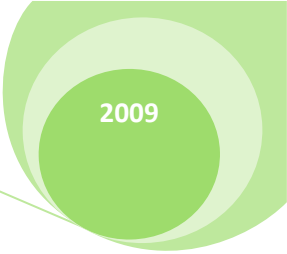
Total Students	16	100%
Attended All Sessions	4	25%
Attended 3-4 Sessions	6	38%
Attended 1-2 Sessions	6	38%



First Time Eligible Successful Attendance

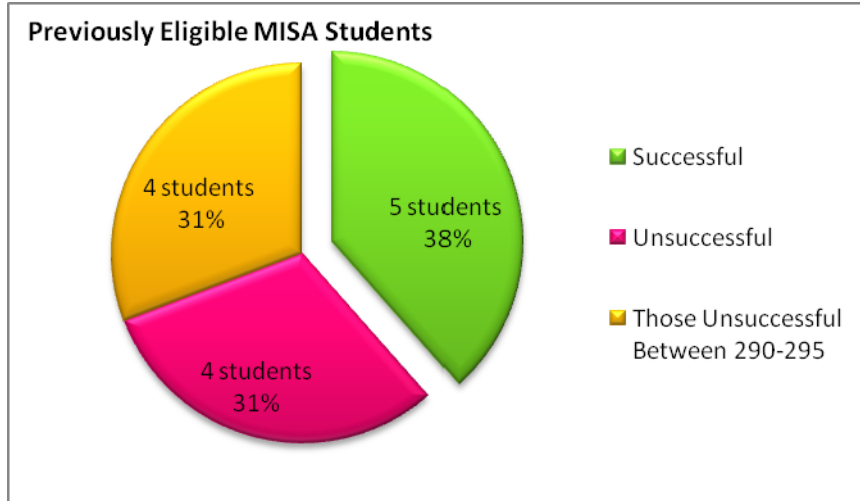
Total Students	16	100%
Attended All Sessions	4	25%
Attended 3-4 Sessions	6	38%
Attended 1-2 Sessions	6	38%





Previously Eligible

Total	13	100%
Successful	5	38%
Unsuccessful	8	62%
Those Unsuccessful Between 290-295	4	50%



Previously Eligible Unsuccessful Attendance

Total	8	100%
Attended All Sessions	1	12%
Attended 3-4 Sessions	5	63%%
Attended 1-2 Sessions	2	25%

