

# Joyful

## Literacy Interventions

PART ONE

Early Learning  
Classroom Essentials

Janet Nadine Mort PhD



PRE-K TO 3

IMPLEMENTATION STORIES: Teachers and School Districts  
A Research-Based Approach

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## Preface

### About this Book: Joyful Literacy Interventions

#### *Using Stepping Stones to reach the Grade 2 Milestone*

##### My Intentions

This was a very intentional book. I knew that over 90% of all children should be successful (not just 70%) by the end of grade 2. I wanted to do what I could to change the trajectory of the lives of the vulnerable children. With this in mind, I believed that you would want the following information:

- Compelling recent research about what will have greatest literacy impact by grade 2;
- Recommended sources for further exploration;
- Motivating stories and photos of teachers, schools and school systems that are achieving success;
- Strategies for engaging families;
- A checklist describing the ideal classroom; and
- Practical ideas for implementation.

There are no programs and no sequential *steps* for teaching literacy. The joyful part of teaching children is the holistic excitement of discovery through a variety of mutually reinforcing experiences. Letters become words, sounds become shapes, drawings become stories, books become inspiration, writing becomes reading, upside down becomes right side up and reversals turn around. No two children develop literacy skills in the same way or in the same order. In “the old days” that’s what we counted on—and it didn’t work. We used the shotgun approach—shoot programs into the classrooms and cross our fingers.

We now know the specific essential skills children must learn in order to be competent readers by the end of grade 2. Although these skills will have the greatest impact on future literacy success, there is no universally recommended order for teaching them. To the untrained eye, the ideal classroom might look like a chaotic theater of experiences that may or may not be linked. Yet the capable teacher connects them in a joyful choreography of interdependence.

##### The Metaphor

How do I describe this process in an orderly way when there is no apparent order? There is no series of steps. I decided to use the metaphor of *Stepping Stones*. Each chapter begins with an image of *Stepping Stones* in water. Consider crossing a pond with natural stone formations. We make our way across, but those following us or leading us do not necessarily take the same route; however, we have the same objective—to make it safely and successfully to the other side.

Think about it this way.

- As we consider our path across the pond, we look for different signs. Which stones look slippery? Shoes become a consideration.
- Which stones are surrounded by water lilies? I might want to stop there to enjoy their fragrance or the creatures submerged beneath.
- Could I explore downstream using a route different from yours and still end up on the other side? Perhaps, but if not, I could always backtrack and try a different route.
- Although I feel confident today and ready to take risks, you want to stay in the shallow areas. It's okay to want to feel safe.
- One pair of stepping-stones requires a big jump; if I stay and practice, I'll bet I can conquer it.
- My friend has never crossed a pond before and is afraid. My parents and I have been here before—I think I'll teach him how.

## The Connection between the Stepping Stones Metaphor and Literacy

And so it is with literacy development. Literacy skills and concepts are the *Stepping Stones*. Literacy success by the end of grade 2 is the *Milestone*. We know we must offer multiple routes to the other side of the pond—giving children choices that support their comfort levels: offering them challenges; providing alternatives; creating safe places where they can linger and practice new skills; designing a privacy screen that allows them dignity; making sure that their individual path is just right for them—no competition or comparisons with others necessary. Self-esteem is high on our priority list.

We must offer all essential literacy skills and concepts from the get-go. Some children will be ready, and some will not. We have to encourage them to try different paths to the other side. We have to “catch them before they fall.” We have to celebrate every effort no matter how small or how little progress is made. We have to model and encourage their peers to model what it could look like when vulnerable children find the courage to try. Trying is all we ask and want.

As educators, we must use assessment, teaching, and tracking progress—just like scientists—to ensure we are doing the right thing. There is no room for guesswork when it comes to children's lives. We have to be patient and provide multiple “doses” for those who need practice—and we have to make it FUN!!!

## Stepping Stones to Milestones

The nine Stepping Stones identified in Figure 1 are the Chapter organizers. The research and skills described within these Chapters will have the greatest impact on children's future literacy success. There are other important *Stepping Stones*—highly desirable ones such music, art, drama, physical exercise and dance. In the early years many of these experiences can be integrated into literacy in meaningful ways. The *Milestone*, however, is literacy by grade 2, achieved in a happy and playful environment. We have to keep our “eye on the prize” as my dear friend Clara often reminds me.

## The Structure of this Book

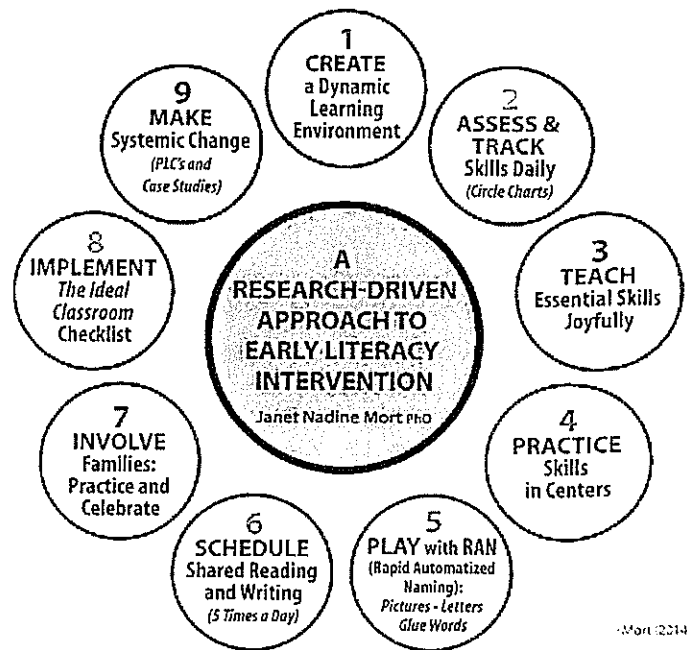


Figure 1. Nine *Stepping Stones* to the Grade 2 Milestone

This graphic is a summary of the *Stepping Stone* Chapters 1 through 9. The central circle emphasizes that the chapters are constructed on a central research base, and it also identifies the components considered as essential skills and concepts. The numerical order does not imply a sequence. Within each chapter you will find suggestions for integration of skills and concepts and cross-referencing among them. Indeed, it was difficult to separate the topics but for multiple reasons—especially to provide order for the reader—it was necessary. Each chapter features a reflection about the importance of the chapter topic; a research summary and authors' opinions as well as recommended books; practical teachers' stories describe ideas and experiences about putting the research into action in classrooms and school districts. The summary challenges us to take action.

### On a Personal Note

I wrote this book for vulnerable children, as well as those who work with them, in the hope that we can accelerate a systemic response to their needs through a grassroots movement. Time is running out. Educators could make the difference—to our economy, our social system and its growing pains—but more importantly, to the 30% of our population who are vulnerable and need us to speak and act on their behalf. There is no time to waste. I wrote the book under tight time pressures, limited resources and took a calculated risk in doing so. Now it's over to you.

Any part you can play in moving vulnerable children through the *Stepping Stones* to the other side of the pond will be a *Milestone* for each vulnerable child at the end of grade 2. I cheer you on! Let me know if there is anything I can do to help you along the way.

## *Urgent Advice for Administrators*

Kindergartens are in crisis. They are often unsupported by administrators who may not understand the emerging predicament in our countries. More and more children, for economic and social reasons, are entering kindergarten vulnerable; most have not previously been in public institutions and their conditions go undiagnosed. These children absorb all a classroom teacher's available energy and time when systemic supports have not been put in place and are not available early in the year. If you are an administrator, please take a leadership role in addressing this issue. If you are a kindergarten teacher, please appeal to your administrator with this information. Other primary teachers may need the same support in very vulnerable neighborhoods.

At the beginning of the kindergarten classroom year I recommend that all extra human resources such as counsellors, speech language pathologists and learning resource staff be assigned to these classes on an urgent basis. Obvious behaviors and challenges must be assessed as quickly as possible and be afforded immediate, appropriate support.

I also recommend that the kindergarten teachers receive additional adult support in the classroom for several hours a day; this would allow them to conduct the alphabetic principle, phonological awareness, sight words and print concept assessments as described in Chapter Two of this book.

Without such support, the kindergarten teacher will be left, for safety reasons, to struggle with managing behavior as her top priority. She will have no time to assess literacy skills and related small group instruction; this will result in leaving challenged children to remain un-assessed, perhaps until their grade one year, simply delaying progress for all.

All the best, Janet N. Mort PhD  
jnmort@shaw.ca



**Joyful** Literacy Interventions Series  
**PART TWO**

**Goal:  
Reading  
at Grade  
Level  
K to 3**

**Over  
90%  
of All  
Children**

# Putting on the Blitz

**Our Breakthrough  
Methodology!**

**Janet Nadine Mort PhD**



**For Teachers: Innovative reproducible tools for assessing, tracking and teaching skills**

**For Children: Playful strategies for reaching mastery at grade level**

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## **"Blitz" Skills Joyfully**

### **Janet's Introduction**

#### **The Birth of the "Blitz"**

I had a theory; I found a strong research base that was not debatable; I analyzed school district results to determine why some districts were more successful in the Early Learning field than others; I invited school districts to engage with me to test my theories about our capacity to be successful with over 90% of all children regardless of their culture, ethnicity, lack of experience with literacy in the preschool years or even their socio-economic backgrounds – all believed to doom young children to an illiterate future and school challenges in my early years in the school system.

I was so fortunate to meet Leslie Lambie, Superintendent of School District 59 Peace River South, who shared my vision and passion. She expressed an interest in providing me with a forum and a partnership in her district to implement, test and measure my research-based theories and to work with approximately 60 volunteer teachers who were also hopeful and optimistic that we could do a better job than we had in the past.

I was to visit the district for two-day professional development sessions with this group – introducing them to the latest research, engaging them in discussion and planning activities for implementation and guiding them in adjusting and monitoring the proposed Joyful Literacy Intervention Strategy as the year progressed. My visits in August and November were exciting and rewarding, mostly because I found myself engaged with some of the most dedicated and determined primary teachers I have ever worked with – and I have worked with many over my 35 years of leadership in the school system.

My January visit was compelling and important to us all. Data collection was an expectation at the outset of the project and all staff had agreed to participate in collecting and submitting data to the central office to be compiled. In my view this reflected on the trust the staff had for their superintendent who promised that the

data would be used respectfully and only to enhance district, school and individual practices. She also made it clear that the school was the entity for change and staff members were responsible collectively for considering results at the school level with the leadership of the principal.

The superintendent projected the data for the group to consider (Figure 1). Note that no schools were named or identified publicly. Schools, of course, were already in possession of their own data so could readily recognize where their data fit in the district picture. The room was still and silent as almost 100 staff members scanned the charted data. They were asked to identify anomalies in the data:

- What was surprising?
- What was worrisome?
- What trends could they see?
- Was there any data that raised questions?
- What were the questions they wanted to ask?

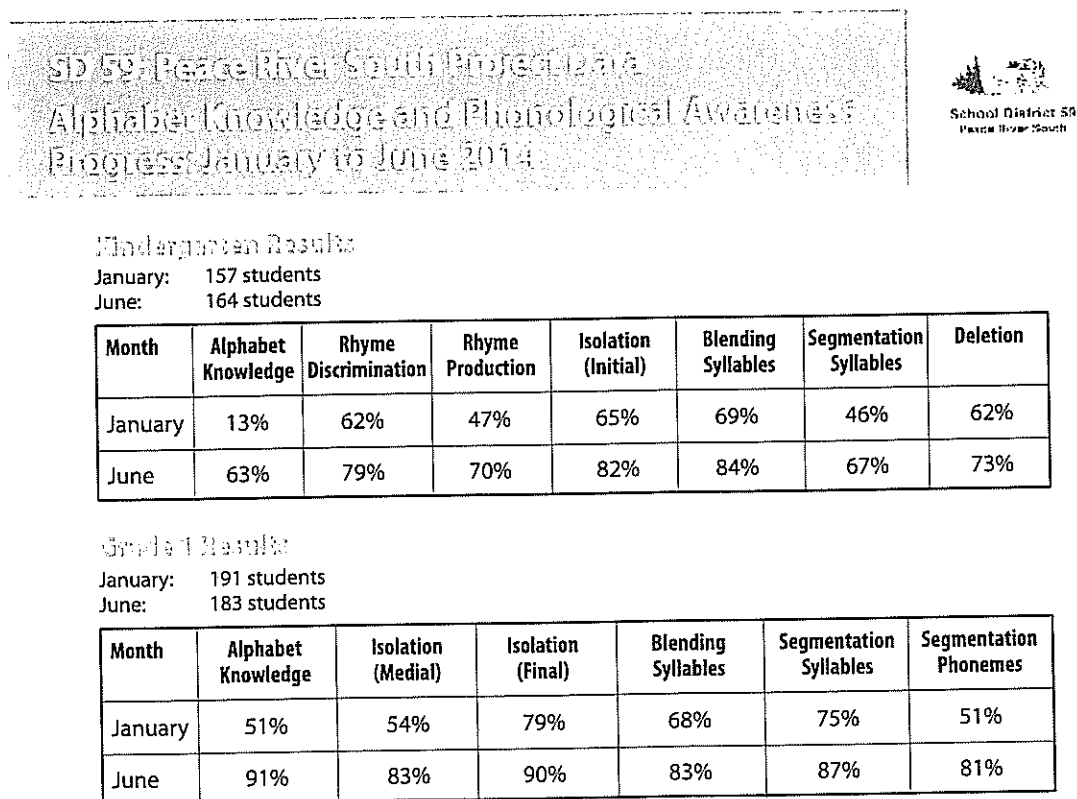


Figure 1

The staff members were sitting in school groups at round tables with their principals. They were asked to discuss these questions among themselves then share their responses with the whole group. At this stage there was no effort to answer the questions. Groups were next asked to return to table discussions to speculate

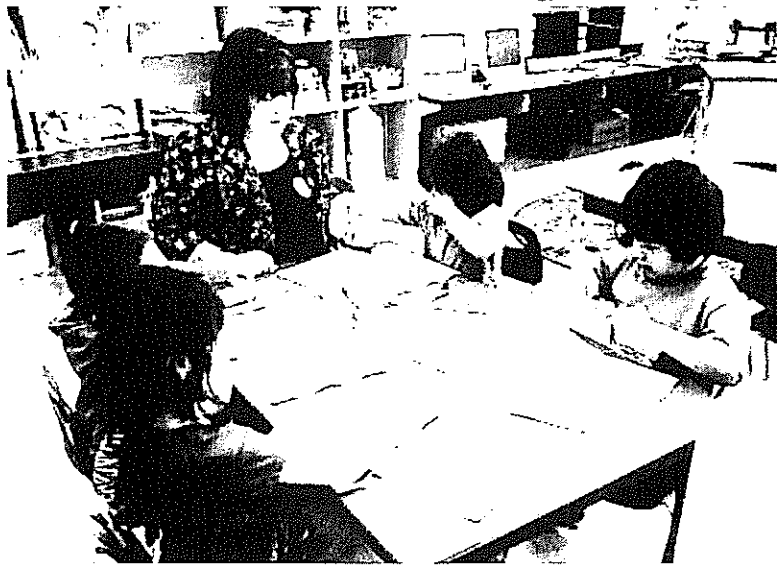
about what might have caused any trends in the data. Again we turned to the whole group to share some of the speculation. We had not intended to discuss individual schools at all but what happened next was remarkable.

Principals began to speak up identifying which school was theirs, explaining why the data appeared the way it was. Individual teachers spoke up and pointed out which data belonged to them and described why there were discrepancies from other schools. Influential factors included rate of attendance, cultural differences, second language issues, competing priorities, teacher illness and lack of resources. Where data was higher than normal professionals explained how they had achieved such successes and the factors that had contributed. This was unexpected but impressive.

It became apparent in the discussion that the issue of 'doses' arose. It became apparent that vulnerable children need more practice with new skills than children who learn a new skill after just one or two lessons. Teachers agreed that after they introduced the skill as many as 50% of the children mastered the skill with one or two practice activities, whereas many children needed as many as 10 to 20 experiences using the new skill in a variety of ways – kinesthetic, writing, reading, playing and celebrating final successes.

We decided to use the medical term 'doses' as a reference point for this concept. We concluded that we had to build in strategies that would give vulnerable children the opportunity for increased 'doses' immediately after instruction so they didn't fall behind their peers. This is why ongoing assessments are so important: To plan daily instruction and plan the 'doses' required teachers need to have an immediate tool to reference so they are able to organize groups with 'like-needs.' We decided to use the *Circle Charts* as our strategy for tracking each child's progress.

The initial focus for the first term was Alphabet Knowledge and Phonological Awareness. With respect to the alphabet one teacher pointed out that her results were low because she had spent the first term of the year focusing on Phonological Awareness, Print Concepts and establishing Practice Centers – all valid priorities in kindergarten; she expressed a desire to move forward with the alphabet quickly as she saw how many other classes had done so. (One of the stated goals was that all children know the alphabet four ways – the sound of the letter, the name of letter, the ability to find it in a book and to print it – in order for mastery to be recorded in the *Circle Charts*.)



Learning the Alphabet four ways.

We asked school groups, once again, to review their data; to decide if they were on target with the district goals; to make a plan for how to reach the district goals; and to take responsibility as a whole school for ensuring that children in the early years would achieve at grade level by the end of grade two. We asked them to brainstorm creative ways of achieving this by reconsidering how they might re-deploy school-based resources in innovative ways.

As groups reported back it became apparent that the need for increased 'doses' had to be part of the solution. The immediate backlash from the entire group was that we CANNOT resort to any type of 'skill and drill.' Young children thrive when engaging in playful activities; when they laugh, they're excited, they achieve, they wonder, they experiment. How could we create an experience for these vulnerable children where they could have many playful practice 'doses' and love the experience? We set about to create it and implement it. I consider the "Blitz" to be one of the most innovative and successful strategies I have been part of inventing along with our team of teachers in Peace River South – true out-of-the-box thinking.

## What is a "Blitz"?

To put it simply, **A BLITZ IS AN INTENTIONAL STRATEGY DESIGNED FOR A GROUP OF TARGETED CHILDREN WHO HAVE SIMILAR SKILL NEEDS.**

Let's dig into the meaning of this. 'Similar skill needs' are key words in this definition. In order to conduct a Blitz we need to be able to identify (at a moment's glance) which of the children have similar skill needs. The *Circle Charts* have been our most effective way to do this. We encourage you, if you don't use the *Circle Charts*, to create your own system that identifies each essential skill and where each child is in terms of progress.

## How urgent is the urgency?

Interesting question! Just as I was writing this part of the book I received the following email (excerpt). *"About a year or two ago, my wife came back home from one of your conferences and the word that she dropped in my soul from you was that the work that we ought to do on vulnerable readers is that 'urgent' and in multiple 'doses.' This has had a great influence on my thinking and performance in the classroom. When you have a bit of time, please drop me a note. I would like to hear directly from you. How urgent is the urgency?"*

The answer: There can be no greater urgency when it comes to literacy for struggling and vulnerable children. These are the unlucky children – maybe not unlucky in loving families – but unlucky in families who are not literate.

## When do we use a Blitz?

### Which children belong in a Blitz?

A Blitz is used when there is a need to accelerate learning in a specific skill. You cannot have a successful Blitz unless your children are grouped effectively. If they don't require additional 'doses' of skill practice then we are wasting their time. If they do require additional 'doses' of the skill then they have an opportunity to work with

their peers who have similar needs, can support each other together and can celebrate as a group as they achieve mastery.

## How do we decide which children belong in a Blitz?

We will only know through detailed skill assessments. We recommend that assessments in kindergarten be completed in September and October or as soon as possible so that needy children can be targeted as soon as possible. In kindergarten, Phonological Awareness and Alphabet knowledge are most important as well as Print Concepts. Print Concepts, however, can be introduced and assessed on an ongoing basis during morning messages and shared reading. This is not an overwhelming task: Assess Alphabet knowledge in September and move to Phonological Awareness in October.

Approach your principal or other members of staff to cover your class during PE, center play time, or propose that some classes be combined to give you private time to get these assessments completed. Assessments typically take only 5 minutes per child in the beginning. Later in the year, assessments can be kept up-to-date during quick personal assessments during daily work with guided reading, center time and other quiet times in the classroom. Once we have the assessments completed we are in a position to identify key skills where gains can be made quickly by identifying groups who have the same skill need and would be served well by a Blitz.

## How long should a Blitz last?

You will hear stories in the next section of this chapter from different schools that have used the Blitz, and they each have used the Blitz as it was meaningful to them – and that's the way it should be. Overall, however, we have found that an effective Blitz needs only to last – at the most – 2 to 3 weeks. The reason: After 20 to 30 experiences with practicing the skills they have learned through the Blitz, most children are ready to 'graduate.' They have learned the skills, know how to apply them and are ready to take the next steps. They may not be involved in a Blitz again – or – they may be involved again when there is another skill that they have not mastered. Some children, unfortunately, do not achieve mastery through the Blitz.

We do not continue this strategy for them; rather we seek individual support for them through professional specialists – hearing, eyesight, psychology, learning, emotional or physical issues – children who may have special conditions that need a special diagnosis. We do not want to waste time if these children need extra-special services. One Blitz is enough before we start to look for other more serious issues that may be impeding learning when we find a child who is not making progress through the Blitz. This is a powerful and instant way to find the Tier 3 children who require different services quickly before it is too late for interventions.

## How frequently do vulnerable children experience the Blitz in a week or a month or a year?

In our stories you will find that the decisions vary and you should make your own choices based on your circumstances. My best experience was in the Tribal School where the Blitz was held four times a week from 1:00 pm to 2:15 pm – Monday to Thursday. This left Friday for classroom special events and planning time for the Blitz team. The important impact, from my perspective, is that the children had almost daily 'doses' with

little time to forget the skill message and apply it in their daily work in the classroom. You will hear other rationales in the Blitz stories in other sites and I believe they are also legitimate. DO WHAT WORKS FOR YOU!

## What does a Blitz look like?

A Blitz can happen in an empty classroom, in a play space, outdoors or in an individual classroom – anywhere – where there is space for four groups of children who want to play a game. We recommend that there be only three or four centers for the Blitz, each one featuring a different way of, and a different approach to Blitzing the skill. Children usually only participate in the Blitz for about 70 minutes, spending about 15 minutes in each center before rotating to the next center. We recommend an adult at each center – older students, Teacher Assistants, the principal, the Learning Assistance teacher, volunteer parents – anyone who has been **trained** in how to work with struggling learners – trained in how to motivate them, how to praise them and reinforce them, how to play the games and how to lead the activities.

What does a Blitz look like? It looks like a child's party. The games are fun. The children collaborate and celebrate each other. They beam with pride. They laugh when they achieve success. They poke each other and then collaborate. They celebrate each other's success. They collect stickers, pats on the back and delight from the people who lead their game or activity. They **glow**. They object when they 'graduate' after two weeks and don't get to come back tomorrow. The Blitz experience is a place of joy and celebration.



Rewards are fun!

## How do we assess the children's progress?

We recommend that the Learning Assistance teacher lead the Blitz organization and implementation. In our Tribal School Nancy Eassie (the Learning Assistance teacher) is the person who analyses the progress of the children in multi-grade classrooms and designs the Blitz to reflect the similar needs of the children so that the



Nancy, professional in charge

Blitz can be targeted to like-skill-needs. She trains the individuals who work with the children at each center but most importantly she receives the children at the last center of the day and assesses whether they have mastered the targeted skills. This often takes the full two weeks but it is Nancy who makes the final call and informs the classroom teacher of the mastery.



While I emphasize the importance of professional leadership in the Blitz program I cannot underestimate the importance of the communication between the Blitz program and the classroom teacher. The classroom teacher must be the team leader for the children. The teacher assesses the skills; the classroom teacher maintains the ongoing monitoring of the *Circle Chart* or other tracking mechanisms. The classroom teacher consults with the Blitz leader over the selection of the children. The Blitz leader stays in close touch with the classroom teacher and finally provides the teacher with mastery results or recommendations for other approaches if the Blitz has not proven to be effective.

### Putting the Blitz into Action

The Blitz has been implemented in over one hundred classrooms for over three years. As teachers have become familiar with the Blitz they have adapted it to suit their own needs. We encourage this adaptation, as no two schools or classrooms are alike.

Ten features of blitzing are not negotiable from our experience and research-based expertise:

1. Assessments must be conducted prior to the design of the Blitz and the design must be the source of all decisions related to the Blitz.
2. Games and activities used in the Blitz must be playful, joyful, and be constructed so that children experience multiple ways of applying the skills.
3. The skills must be "essential skills" based on research as described in the *Circle Charts*.
4. Children are engaged in the Blitz only until skill mastery is achieved; then they graduate from the Blitz process.
5. If the Blitz does not appear to work for a child after multiple 'doses' professional staff need to plan for more individualized interventions.
6. Children must see blitzing as a joyful experience; otherwise change your strategy or provide resistant children with a different experience.
7. The Blitz does not replace the classroom teacher who has prime responsibility for each child's growth. Intense communication between the Blitz program and the classroom teacher is essential. The teacher must ultimately be responsible for the growth and development of each child, supported and enhanced by the Blitz program.
8. Table activity leaders in the Blitz program, whether they be older children, paraprofessionals or volunteers, must be trained by professionals so that their interactions with children are supportive and consistent with the goals of the Blitz.
9. The leader of the Blitz program must be a professional staff member trained in intervention strategies.
10. Only children with similar needs are organized as part of a Blitz. Some children may never participate if they do not have a need.

## Teachers' Blitz Stories

1

Parkland Elementary School  
SD 59 Peace River South

Sharlene Weingart (K/1 teacher)

### Our Blitz!

#### *1. How do you assess and track skills before you begin a Blitz?*

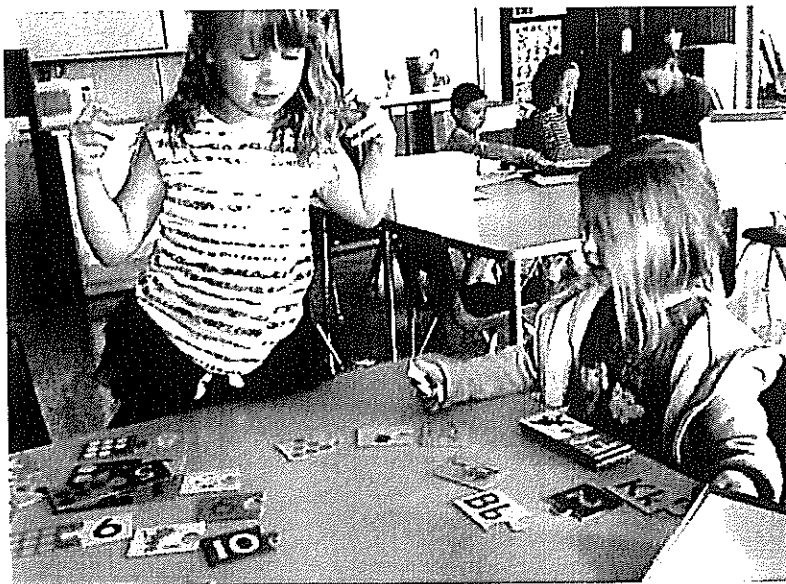
I start the year assessing Phonological Awareness skills, Alphabet Knowledge and Sight Words. My first Blitz is generally on Phonological Awareness skills. Once those are mastered or well underway, I move into Alphabet and finally Sight Words. Once we are approaching mastery, we have a fluency Blitz with choral readings and readers' theatre. My class is a split grade, so it's important to do an initial assessment early on so that I am able to use student time effectively. I individualize what they are working on for each Blitz. In some cases, where students are meeting all the skills already, they become the models in the groups.

#### *2. When in the year do you first establish blitzing?*

Initially I started blitzing at the very beginning of the school year. Upon reflection, I will be focusing first on self-regulation and classroom routines before I begin a Blitz. My goal for the coming year is to start blitzing in October. We do a series of Blitzes during the year. I assess once a week at one of the Blitz stations so that I can determine whether we are making gains or need to adjust our methods. This is also how I individualize for students every week. I should be clear though that I start assessment right away because that is what influences my planning and teaching from the start.

#### *3. Describe how you organize your blitzing.*

To organize a Blitz, I start by assessing the children's skills. I track their progress on a *Circle Chart* and use this information to form multi-ability groups. I don't want kids who are



Mixed ability groups provide opportunities for teaching each other.

learning the same skills in the same group because they need models of what they are going to learn. During the Blitz process, my focus is on the most vulnerable children. Mixed groups work because the students have individual goals (word lists, alphabet letters) in the group, but they play the same game. So, if one child doesn't know how to read a word, there is someone in the group who can help. They always have someone they can ask or look to as a model. Mixed ages and abilities have worked well in this case.

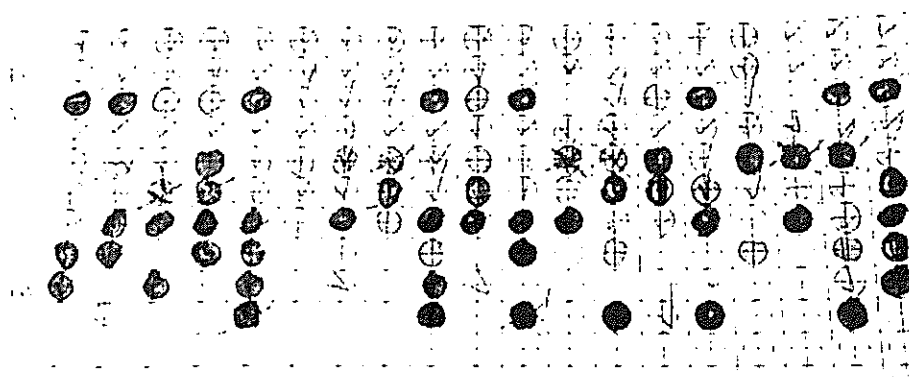
Students have a folder that I load with their individual sight words or alphabet letters each Monday. They carry this with them and keep any game boards in it. It shows me what they have accomplished and keeps them accountable. I have been able to show the student a correlation between the work they did (or didn't) do and their graph progress. It keeps us all focused on the goals for each child.

I use the assessment data I collect using the *Circle Charts* to form multi-ability groups. The groups are flexible and I change them regularly to allow kids to work with new people. On Thursdays, the center I lead becomes the assessment center, so each group just rotates through as one of their regular stops.

My very first assessment is done in one color, in this case green. I check them with a pen or pencil as I assess them and then color them in afterwards to save time. The 'x' means I went back and checked in a later week and they didn't have the word, so the word went back in their list to work on. I don't have them reread all the words every week, just the new ones, but about once a month, for kids I'm not sure about, I'll go back and double check all the words.

### Thursday: Assessment Day

not words



Each week I choose a different color. This allows me to see the growth. When I see a week or more without significant improvement, I know I need to change what I was planning for the sight-word centers, or have individual conversations with students who weren't putting in an effort, based on what I see in their results and their folders. I choose the words for each child based on this chart as well. Student #3 on this list would have two words from this page and then I would flip to the next page to get the next words. I generally choose 10 words a week as a focus.

I use this format each week to outline what will take place at each center and who will lead it, and to organize the groups. Each adult has a copy along with one group member.

#### 4. Who is involved in implementing the Blitz?

We have combined classrooms during Blitzes, so we have had two teachers and the principal along with any support staff who may be available. We have had as many as 35-40 children and two to five staff members at any given time. When we haven't had adults available to run centers, we ensure that some centers encourage kids to be independent. Teaming up really works well because it gives you the most teacher/student time at more centers.

#### 5. How many children have been engaged over the past year?

We had about 35 children involved during the past year in grades K-4.

#### 6. What skills have your Blitzes focused on?

We start the year with Phonological Awareness skills. From there we move into Alphabet knowledge and then into Sight Words. My class this year was a K/1 so some kids might be working on Sight Words at a center while others are working on the alphabet. We included printing formation and fluency in our Blitz centers. We found that when children had to write the word or letter as part of the game they remembered the item better.

Literacy Groups Week of : Insert Dates Here		
Start at the Center with the same number as your group. Centers will be 15 minutes each.		
I recommend mixed ability groups so that students support and teach each other at independent centers. These groups also allow for focus on the most vulnerable students at teacher led centers.		
Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Group 4	Group 5	Group 6
Group 7		

Centers and Leaders		
Highlight and change to meet your needs.		
Center & Leader	Location	Supplies
Shared Reading Mrs. Weingart	Carpet	Clifford's Family
1. Mini Journals Mrs. Dueck	Rainbow Table	Mini-Journals, pencils
2. Roll A Word Mrs. Smith	Table 1	Dice, Templates, Word/letter lists, pencils
3. ABC Reading	Blue Table	ABC Charts, Books, Glasses, Pointers
4. Stamping Names, Sight Words	Table 2	Letter stamps, ink pad
5. Candy Land Sight Words	Table 3	Board Game, Mini White Boards, Dry erase markers
6. Reading Mrs. Wright	Carpet	Book boxes, Leveled PM books
7. Read to Self		
This is where I include notes for the week. This form is provided to all staff and volunteers.		

**7. Describe the kind of activities children engage in, in a Blitz. Provide a few examples.**

Before every Blitz we start with shared reading to bring our focus back to the big picture. We are doing the blitzing to learn what we need to know to help us read books. It is important to teach the reason we are learning the alphabet in four ways or with sight words. It all helps students become better readers and writers. We think of it as a whole-part-whole model so that the children aren't just getting buckets of information that are not related to anything or not useful outside centers.

We started with centers that were very playful (musical chair sight words) but we found that the children were not retaining the information; they were vulnerable kids from older grades leading centers. We thought that they would learn along with the others, but we found that they were "flat-lined" in our data collection. They needed to be part of a group with their own individualized list of words to work on.

We added a writing component to each center and saw a huge increase in retention. For example, we had *Sight Word Tic-Tac-Toe* where they had to place a marker over the words and read them. When we changed it to writing their word in the box, the retention and fluency of printing the word increased. So, rather than working on a worksheet, writing became part of a game with a purpose. It makes it fun!



Brothers at Tic-Tac Sight Word

*Roll-a-Sight-Word* was another popular game and brought a number-sense skill into the time. Students had a game board filled in for them ahead of time (individualized to the words he/she was learning) and then rolled the die. They wrote the word in the column for the number they rolled to see which word would reach the top first.

The children enjoyed *Go Fish* and would read and write down the word of the fish they caught. I found that these centers worked well for grade one and up. For the kindergarten children, I found that they needed to experience the sight words in a book before it was meaningful for them to practice. For them, it worked well if we learned a sight word in a choral poem or a story and then searched for the word and wrote it down on a clipboard. Again, the whole-part-whole is so important! 3D movie glasses without the lenses made this fun.

**8. Can you provide hard data that show blitzing makes a difference (graphs, numbers, etc.)?**

Acceleration ... as I was tracking the data on the *Circle Charts*, I noticed something shocking. Kids were making huge gains. This is when I actually sat down and graphed the data.

## Sight Word Progress May 7: Three Months

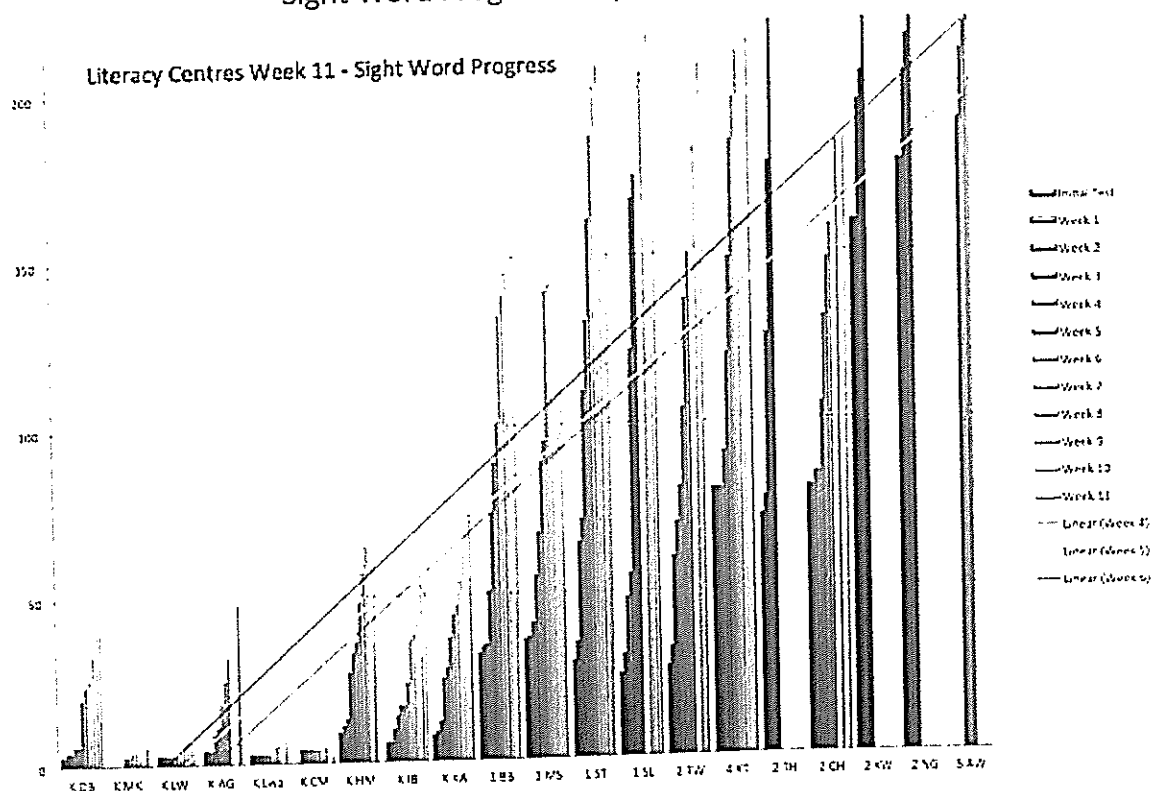


Figure 2

This was the acceleration curve we were learning to aim for in Reading Recovery and I was seeing it occur across the class. This result motivated me to keep going with planning, individualizing, etc.



It can look messy, and it can be kind of loud, but the data shows it is working! This is a combined k/1/2/3.



# ABC Upper and Lowercase Four Ways Kindergarten Alphabet Literacy Group 10 Weeks

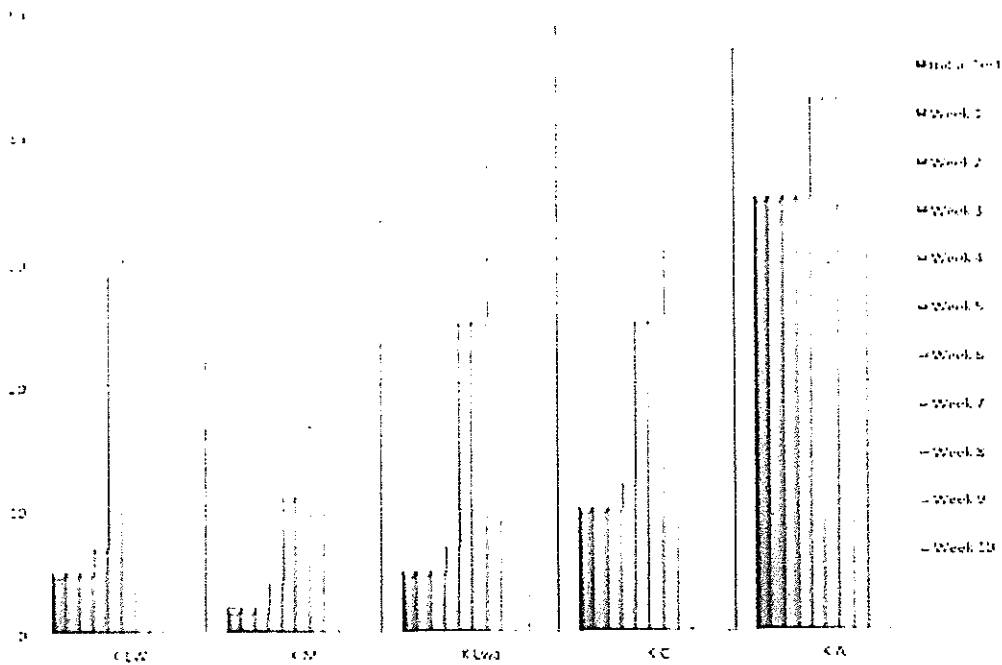


Figure 3

This group of kindergarten students was not progressing with their Alphabet Knowledge and would likely have gone into grade one without knowing the alphabet four ways based on their progress. Now it's easier to count the letters they don't know four ways! They will master this and will be learning to read alongside their peers. One of these students is ESL. Two of them joined our class during the second term of school. I have nine students in kindergarten, but this represents only the ones who had not attained the alphabet goal as of January 15th.

The following chart (Figure 4) shows the progress of the kindergarten group from the first year in the Sight Word and Alphabet data. This is what they were able to accomplish in grade one. Their Sight Word data are shown on the bar graph along with the text box that shows their end-of-year reading level using unseen text. I am so proud of these kids! This is the progress we can see with targeted instruction and a growth



Sight word fluency, reading and writing in kindergarten.

mindset. Every child deserves our best and they can all learn. We just have to do what works. If we concentrate on the skills they are missing, we can give them the very best start.

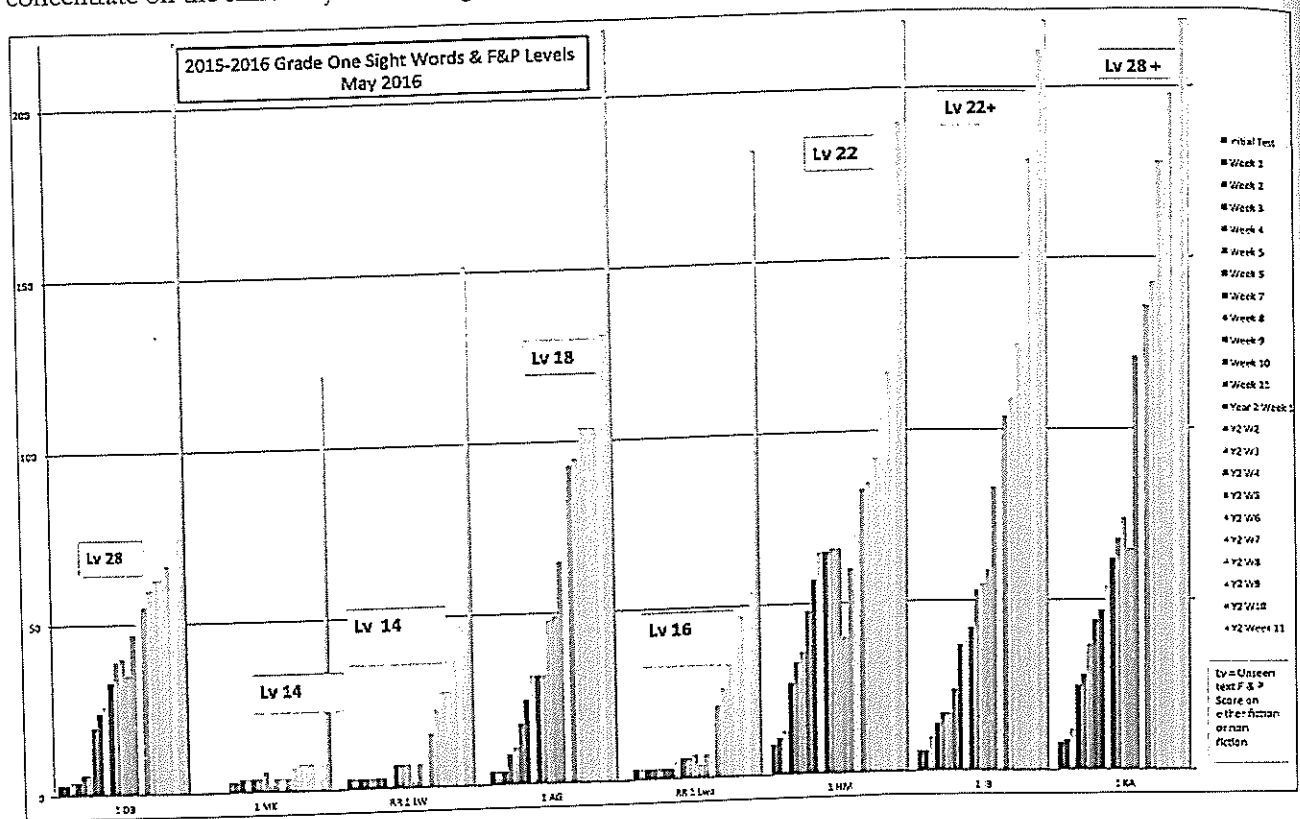


Figure 4

### 9. What were the biggest speed bumps you faced?

Our biggest challenge was getting and keeping staff on board and keeping track of data every week. Actually graphing the data to show the growth made participating hard to argue with. Our data showed accelerated growth across the class. It was worth the time and effort to plan, individualize and get others on board where necessary. Supporting each other and sharing ideas based on weekly data made a huge difference in overcoming obstacles. When we slowed down on weekly meetings, we saw deterioration in teamwork. The weekly meeting, bringing the data from the week, keeps the focus on the kids and what they need next. I highly recommend meeting each week and sharing the workload.

### 10. What were your greatest achievements?

Our greatest achievement was the progress made by our most vulnerable children. Many were at least a year behind in reading. They not only caught up to grade level, but in some cases exceeded grade level. This year we have grade one students reading at or above grade level, along with many kindergarten students. This success allows us to focus on the kids who need the most attention. We know that we can make a huge difference for them by targeting the skills they need. I feel confident that we can make a difference for every child, not just the ones who are easy to teach.