



MAINE CTE PROMISING PRACTICES MINI CASE STUDY
Lake Region Vocational Center (LRVC)
Naples, ME
Director: Rosie Schacht

PROMISING PRACTICE: Literacy Integration as part of a Regional Focus

Lake Region Vocational Center is in its fourth year of participation in a regional effort to strengthen literacy support across academic and career and technical program areas at the middle and high school levels.

Getting things going

In the fall of 2004, LRVC Director Rosie Schacht and regional curriculum specialists attended a session about the need to get a regional action plan focused on literacy improvement. The session, cosponsored by the Maine Department of Education and the LAB at Brown University, inspired the planning of a professional development activity focused on the importance of providing literacy support. Department heads of the three sending high schools and some CTE instructors attended. Then a district literacy specialist worked with the CTE instructors, while others offered professional development for the high school and middle school staffs.

A group of teachers and administrators from the sending high schools, area middle schools, the technical center, the district curriculum coordinator, and literacy specialists continued to meet and put together a regional literacy plan. “We had great conversations and people really started to buy in to the importance of literacy not as something extra but as part of what we need to do,” according to Schacht. Last year the group expanded to include representatives from the business community. In 2008–09, the group will focus on the needs of employers for graduates who can read, write, and think at high levels.

2007–08 focus

During the 2007–08 school year, one of the ELA teachers from Lake Region High School met with CTE teachers as a group and then individually to discuss how they could best support students to develop reading and writing skills. Since they share many students, the ELA teacher wanted to see if joint research projects that took advantage of the students’ interest in their CTE program area could be assigned. Three CTE instructors took her up on it and students in the Culinary Arts, Health Occupations, and Automotive programs completed shared projects last year. “They did reading that was topic based and then wrote about it — it really got some kids reading,” Schacht said.

The Diversified Occupations and Drafting instructors participated in the second round of Literacy Mentor workshops sponsored by MACTE and the Maine Department of Education. Then they came back and presented the material to colleagues back at LRVC. Because of snow day cancellations, introduction of material to do with vocabulary and writing will be presented early in the 2008–09 school year.

The district administered a survey to determine professional development needs and in response to the data, offered a master’s level course in literacy through USM. Three CTE instructors along with several high school and middle school teachers participated. The course was so well received that a second offering of the course was made this summer. A Construction Technology instructor participated in the summer course and “came back all fired up!” Schacht says that the course has helped to shift the focus on literacy from elementary to K–12 throughout the region.

Professional books related to literacy have been made available on a sign-out basis to teachers throughout the district. Titles include: *Words Words Words*; *Strategies that Work*; *Making the Match Between Readers and Books*; and *The Fluent Reader*. Sometimes they do not get returned but according to Schacht, that’s just fine: “If we can loan them out and people don’t return them, oh well, somebody’s reading it and that’s a good thing.”

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Schacht recognizes the importance of the director in supporting teachers to infuse literacy support through making classroom libraries and program resources available, providing substitutes so teachers can attend professional development, making literacy a focus of staff meetings, and making time for the staff to learn together. She says the challenge with literacy support is to “make it institutionalized.” “I’ve been here so long,” she says, “I’m not talking about it anymore. We’re just doing it.”

What difference is it making?

Lake Region CTE instructors report that they have added a lot to support a focus on reading and writing through their instruction during the 2007–08 school year. Examples include¹:

- Read short stories weekly from real-life books such as: *Tending Lives*, *Emergency and Rescue*471, and posted interesting excerpts from a book that has a health-related theme from a wide variety of fiction and non-fiction texts that I have available for students to borrow.
- I used word walls more often. Before starting a new unit, for example taxes, we discussed the terms that we would be using. I sometimes had the students look up the word and write the dictionary definition, write their own definition in their own words, and then either draw a photo or find a photo online to visually explain their definitions. I used this most often in my Business Office Technology Program. I also create a lot of check lists for students to use, to make sure their projects are complete. The checklists will have all the things needed to support a rubric. For example, their BOT Career Portfolio.
- To improve literacy in culinary arts we started doing article reports twice a quarter. Students had to read and answer questions. Students had to list three words they did not know and find the definitions. We also read part of the novel, “the making of a chef” in class out loud.

The instructors say that they do not have formal data showing evidence that this type of instruction is making a difference. But several report that they are seeing differences in student reading, writing, and learning. For example:

- At this time, I do not have formal evidence that the activities have improved literacy/learning. This year's students have all passed their CNA exam and they clearly have improved understanding of medical terminology.
- The best evidence is that when we do the word wall activities and discussions, the students seem to have less questions when working on their assignments and/or projects.
- I have seen some in my students this year, but next year will show the real results. Students will be using strategies throughout the school year. The evidence will be how much students retained when it comes time for them to take tests and demonstrate what they have learned.

Perhaps the most convincing evidence that CTE instructors feel this is making a difference is their individual and collective commitment to continue to strengthen literacy support. Most had clear responses about what next steps they planned to take next year to improve their literacy development focus. For example:

- I will continue to build on the activities listed above and use available resources to look for additional ways that I might integrate more academics into the program. One example is to explore online simulations that involve multiple skills such as reading, planning care, graphing results, etc.
- I think I should use more of the homebuilding terms, in the form of testing for a better record of their performance in the upcoming year.
- I plan to create more check lists and vocab lists. I also plan to have students read more short articles regarding topics related to the “business world.”
- My plan is to re-write my curriculum with the use of literacy strategies. This gives me the opportunity to add more technical competencies in reading, writing, and communication.
- I will try to have students read current business articles and express what they learned to the class. This will help students read more and relate what they are learning to current events.

¹ All examples are from faculty survey completed in June 2008.

What Schacht notices is that about half of the CTE instructors actively use Word Walls, those who use the literacy strategies are seeing more learning and more student engagement, and that some of the instructors are “really taking this on and running with it.” “The challenge is that there is a wide range in skills and knowledge and confidence in what they do” across the staff so there is need to make it possible for everyone to keep making progress.

Next steps:

- ✓ Connecting more with the business community and having business and community people communicate the importance of the literacy focus directly to the students
- ✓ Continue literacy professional development onsite led by LRVC literacy mentors
- ✓ Using program related manuals, trade journals, and texts more deliberately and have students reading and writing more
- ✓ More active use of Word Walls and other vocabulary development strategies to support learning and use of technical vocabulary
- ✓ More interaction and integration with the ELA departments from sending schools
- ✓ Examine data to see if NWEA scores predict success on the Accuplacer

For more information, contact Rosie Schacht at rschacht@sad61.k12.me.us

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