



MKN Critical Transitions CoP (Grade 9 locally developed) – June 2018 Executive Summary 1

Revisiting the Three R's from the Ground Up: Relationships, Resilience, and Resources

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The Grade 9 Locally Developed project housed at Lakehead University began its formal work in the spring of 2017 by carrying out extensive relationship building with the partner school board, Lakehead Public Schools. Prior to receiving funding from the Mathematics Knowledge Network, a research team had already been informally established and had had a number of meetings. Ethical approval from both Lakehead University as well as Lakehead Public Schools was obtained, and in June of 2017, in-depth semi-structured interviews of the three teachers at the partner high school who had or were teaching the Grade 9 Locally Developed course were conducted. These were transcribed during the summer of 2017. Given the project mandate of responding to expressed teacher needs, this baseline information gathering was a crucial starting point for our team.

In these interviews, teachers expressed varying needs and concerns about the course. The complete interview transcripts are included (with pseudonyms) in our first Technical Report. In brief, teachers described challenges in terms of the need to learn to build better relationships with the very broad range of students typically in these courses, the need to better support students' growth as well as well-being for students with varying academic and emotional needs, and the need for resources (including non-curricular resources) in order to do so. These ideas became the “Three R's” for our work: relationships, resilience, and resources.

In the fall semester of 2017, we continued to build relationships with teachers and students, by being present in the classrooms on a regular basis. The school ran a grade 9 locally developed course alongside a new course, envisioned and taught by the Mathematics Department Chair, called “Grade 9 Transitions”, in the fall, and a second section of grade 9 locally developed in the winter term. The transitions course concept is a fascinating one; students with varying degrees of academic capacity are encouraged to take a credit course that includes language, mathematics, and general academic and learning skill support. The course fills a critical niche in our region with many students coming from outlying areas with varying degrees of educational backgrounds. We hope, via this project, to support broader implementation of this structure provincially. The three student researchers were each in the classrooms once to several times a week, working directly with students and teachers and learning about their needs. This work was continued during the winter term. A number of new classroom resources, lessons, and so on were designed, field tested and revised, and this work is on-going.

At the end of the fall semester, we interviewed the teachers of both the grade 9 locally developed mathematics as well as the transitions courses (also in Technical Report 1). We also managed to obtain ethics permission to interview two students in the mathematics course (which is very difficult as these students and parents are reticent to participate). The interviews underscore yet again the importance of *relationships*, not as one facet of the learning environment in these courses, but the prerequisite to any further possible learning experiences.

A current future idea is a partnership with the school Board and local “Old Fort William” to support a birch bark basket (two day) workshop, intertwining this authentic activity into a mathematics lesson. Resource creation and field testing are also ongoing (see Technical Report).

The MKN is funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education. The MKN is a KNAER Project, hosted by the Fields Institute for Research in Mathematical Sciences. The views expressed in this executive summary belong to the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Ministry of Education nor the Ontario government.

