

# 2012-2013 Inquiry Case Study



NOII

**School Name:** George M. Dawson Secondary School  
**District:** #50 Haida Gwaii  
**Inquiry Team Members:** Derek Seifert, David Mclean, Zoe Sikora,  
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## **Question/Focus:**

Will a revival of the school wide write increase staff and student recognition that improvements in writing are everyone's responsibility and in everyone's best interest?

## **Scanning:**

Writing is frequently avoided and students are performing below grade level. It has become commonplace for students to skip the written portion of tests.

Essays assigned in English class are often not completed and as curriculum is adapted to suit learners' interests and strengths writing sometimes gets left behind.

## **Focus:**

Our focus is assessment for learning and student ownership of writing processes. We need to foster a love of writing for academic and non-academic purposes.

Along with school wide writes and continued emphasis on the need for students to be able to write essays we will also focus on writing for enjoyment in an attempt to improve attitudes towards writing.

## **Hunch:**

Writing is not a respected skill in our community; writing is not a real world skill.

Artists, fishers, these are the occupations held in high regard; writing plays almost no role in these occupations. However there are many occupations that are less visible where writing is an asset, writing can bring opportunities, and all skills can be used to benefit community.

## **New professional learning:**

Collaboration. We know that we have had successes in our school as a result of collaborative efforts, now we need to take those successes and learn to carry them over into academic endeavours on a school wide level.

We need to take the time to collaboratively assess writing for the benefit of language teachers and non-language teachers alike. We found that writing levels sometimes appalled non-language teachers and that language teachers have become accustomed to low-level writing. Conversation about student writing promotes awareness and keeps us honest. Planning for writing needs to be prioritized in all classrooms.

## **Taking action:**

Last year we re-introduced the school wide write, which we did once. This year we started the year with a write and plan did one more. The marking of the writes is shared between English teachers and other staff members to encourage collaborations amongst staff. A school change

committee is also looking at alternative scheduling that will allow us to focus more attention to our literacy and numeracy goals and increase staff collaboration in these areas.

We only did two writes this year, things come up and seldom do things go the way we envision them. We are doing ability groupings for next year and scheduling has addressed the needs we have demonstrated with the school wide write program.

We are making it a priority to do writing that students enjoy, journals, satire, autobiographical writing.

### **Checking:**

Evidence of growth will come from marking our school wide writes and noting the staff members who participate in the marking. If our school goals are literacy and numeracy then we all need to be on board, a variety of teachers volunteering to mark writes suggests that staff is on board.

The Change Committee outcome will also be an indicator of where we are at in addressing our goals, community members are being asked to join our committee in an attempt to gauge community feeling about school goals and input from community will give us a good idea of whether or not our concerns align with those of the community.

Our marking team saw English, Science, and P.E. teachers sitting down and assessing/discussing literacy. These opportunities to come together from a variety of disciplines are invaluable.

The Change Committee heard that low levels of academic achievement are a community concern and that community members want to see graduates who are able students.

While we did see improvements from October to June we are hesitant to put too much stock in the numbers. The grade 12's clearly did not take the one write seriously as it was not when they had English (from a majority of 'Not Yet Meeting Expectations' to a majority 'Meeting Minimally', with an increase at 'Fully Meeting'), a higher number of students wrote the second write, perhaps we are more generous on the second write when we are tired at the end of the year, there are different choices and thus appeal is varied, and students will show some improvement over a year even if we are not being as effective as we would like.

### **Reflections/Advice:**

We think that a school wide write is always a worthwhile practice, it gives staff a chance to work together, increases awareness of writing levels, provides students with practice, and gives us baseline data.

We suggest that a choice of topics is important, the first time we didn't offer choice and we found that offering choice allowed more people to find something to write about.

We also recommend a focus on autobiographical writing and how to use such writing in a variety of settings. We have found that most students like to write about themselves, sometimes autobiographically and other times as characters in their own fiction. Autobiography can be used to great effect to make writing more engaging, using experience to connect to a variety of sources and writing tasks prepares students to be able to write on most subjects in a manner that is relevant to them.

***EVERY learner crossing the stage with dignity, purpose and options.***