



## 2012 – 2013 AESN Case Study

**Name:** Alert Bay Elementary School  
**District:** #85 Vancouver Island North

### **Inquiry Team Members:**

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### **Question/Focus:**

How will a school wide collaborative focus on common language in writing instructions, integrated with the 6 formative assessment strategies, increase students' ability to communicate through writing, and how will our teaching practices transform in the process?

### **Scanning:**

During our scan we noticed that most students liked to write, however the majority of their writing was basic, non-descriptive and lacked luster. This became evident when assessment coding the class writing samples and our school wide writes.

### **Hunch:**

We have a hunch that we as educators need to enhance how we teach writing.

### **New professional learning and Taking Action:**

As a group of teachers we are coming together as a community of learners. We are learning about and practicing lessons in writing using the 6+1 Writing Traits that focus on: Voice, Organization, Word Choice, Ideas, Sentence Fluency, and Conventions. We are also reading other professional development books that our literacy coaches from Vancouver Island University (VIU) have recommended.

We committed to meeting at least once a month with our teaching partner to discuss and share the writing traits and teaching strategies we are implementing. Two of our school based in-service days have been spent going deeper into understanding how we, collectively can more effectively teach writing to our students and sharing our practices of embedding formative assessment strategies into our classrooms. This year we are working with two literacy coaches from VIU, to support our learning.

### Year One Inquiry:

How will a school wide collaborative focus on common language in writing instructions, integrated with the 6 formative assessment strategies, increase students'

ability to communicate through writing, and how will our teaching practices transform in the process?

We found the action we planned to take, changed with the assistance of our VIU coaches. Sometimes, you think you have the answer, until fresh eyes look in on you. The 6+1 Writing Crate Traits are a good tool, however, we as educators soon realized it's too big of a program to rely on totally in the beginning. We wanted to change our practice and create common language for students and staff. Our coaches suggested two books that changed our approach and deepened our understanding of the importance of specific direct teaching. "Writing Anchors" by Jan Wells and Janine Reid and "What's Next for this Beginning Writer?" by Janine Reid and Betty Schiltze.

The Writing Crates then supported our quest for common language school wide.

### **Checking:**

Monthly checking-ins as a group of educators was fundamental in keeping the writing inquiry project alive along with celebrating the success teachers and students had. The check-ins also supported educators in times of frustration when you weren't seeing the results you had hoped for. The collaborative inquiry approached offered a means for all to be involved, owning the process, and our individual learning. We set the criteria for what we wanted to achieve together. We decided on which formative assessment strategy we would focus on collectively.

Reflecting on our inquiry by going back to the spiral was narrowing, yet broadening our understandings. Each point in the spiral can in itself lead to another totally independent spiral of inquiry. We envisioned it like a spiral mobile hanging in a child's bedroom. These collaborative conversations were tremendously beneficial as they led to a deeper understanding and questioning of our educational practice of teaching writing and the effects we have on students. Yet, they were also terrible speed bumps as we often went way off track of the writing focus and time ran away from us. We would then use the spiral to come back to the focused discussion. When we met with our coaches we would check-in again with the spiral and have open conversations and questioning times. Our coaches provided not only educational support but also emotional support as teaching is very personal. The trust developed by our coaches enabled discussions on changing practice and what that looks like in our classroom, in our monthly plans, and what other supports we may need to move ourselves to change.

Reflecting back on the year, the process of referring back to the spiral and the in-depth discussion that parachuted out from referencing back lead us to much richer, reflective and insight inquiry.

### Year 2 Inquiry:

What changes in students' independent writing will we see if we use the spiral of inquiry throughout the year as a staff?