

# 2012-2013 AESN Spiral of Inquiry Case Study



**School Name:** David Hoy Elementary  
**District:** #91 Nechako Lakes  
**Inquiry Team Members:**

**AEEA Goal Area:** Literacy

## **Question/Focus:**

How will adjusting success criteria and increasing modeling improve success in writing?

## **Scanning**

We were noticing that there was a large gap in academic achievement between individual students in all of our classrooms. We knew that we needed to help all students grow while still maintaining a positive classroom culture. This would be difficult because many of our students were unwilling to take risks in their learning. We noticed that we needed to involve the students more in assessing their own work.

After a year of adjusting success criteria and increasing peer support, teachers have noticed the following:

- There was an increase in student writing skills in every classroom that was involved. This was evident in both the variety and length of writing passages.
- Students were able to identify skills that they had worked on and they were able to specifically identify their individual successes.
- Involving students in the assessment process made them more comfortable and more willing to take risks.

## **Focus**

Adjusting success criteria was a critical aspect of our project. We chose to focus on writing as a vehicle for the success criteria. However, encouraging an open mindset was the most important part. Once one has an open mindset, one is open to learning. Part of learning is realizing that one will make mistakes and be able to learn from them. An open mindset allows one to be curious and continue learning. Learning is not about being the best, but about doing your individual best.

## **Hunch**

We have many students who progress through school and as the achievement gap grows, these students become accustomed to not understanding. If we don't intervene and adjust our assignments for these students individually, they become increasingly at risk of (and used to) failure. In other words, without intervention they begin to expect to not understand, and develop a culture of learned helplessness. This leads to a closed mindset, which inhibits learning.

## **New professional learning**

Our team started the year with a Professional Day focusing on the topic of formative assessment and success criteria.

Our team was also involved in two other projects, the Vancouver Island University Project and the Young Readers Inquiry project.

Our team increased our teaching collaboration and tried to encourage each other.

Our team worked at expanding the lessons from the Carrier Room into our own classrooms.

We increased the amount of team teaching in our school. We worked with the Carrier teacher in many team teaching situations. We received an extra Reading Resource Teacher through the Primary Project and we were able to team-teach with her as well.

The addition of coaching provided by Debbie Koehn added to the success and the collaborative nature of the project. She provided us with strategies at every grade level.

These strategies included:

- A/B partner talk
- Increasing student engagement with text
- Non- text based modeling of writing strategies
- Encouraging First Nation Students that their own experiences are important
- Using Aboriginal texts and stories in our classrooms

Taking action A/B partner talk was implemented on a daily basis in most rooms. Routines and procedures were introduced around how to talk and listen to a partner, building the framework for a learning culture. Once this was in place students felt comfortable enough to take risks and share their writing. Each day they discussed their writing with a partner and looked for evidence of the success criteria. If the criteria weren't there, students worked individually, with a partner, or with a teacher to meet the criteria.

- There was an increase in student modeling that was not limited to the highest academic students showing the other students, but a sharing of what all students could do and how all students were improving. Students were asked to explain how they learned new writing strategies.

## **Checking**

### **Anecdotes**

We felt that the difference we made was significant. It was evident in student writing samples. It was also very evident in the way that students talked about and engaged in their learning. For example, the kindergarten students began to write each other notes.

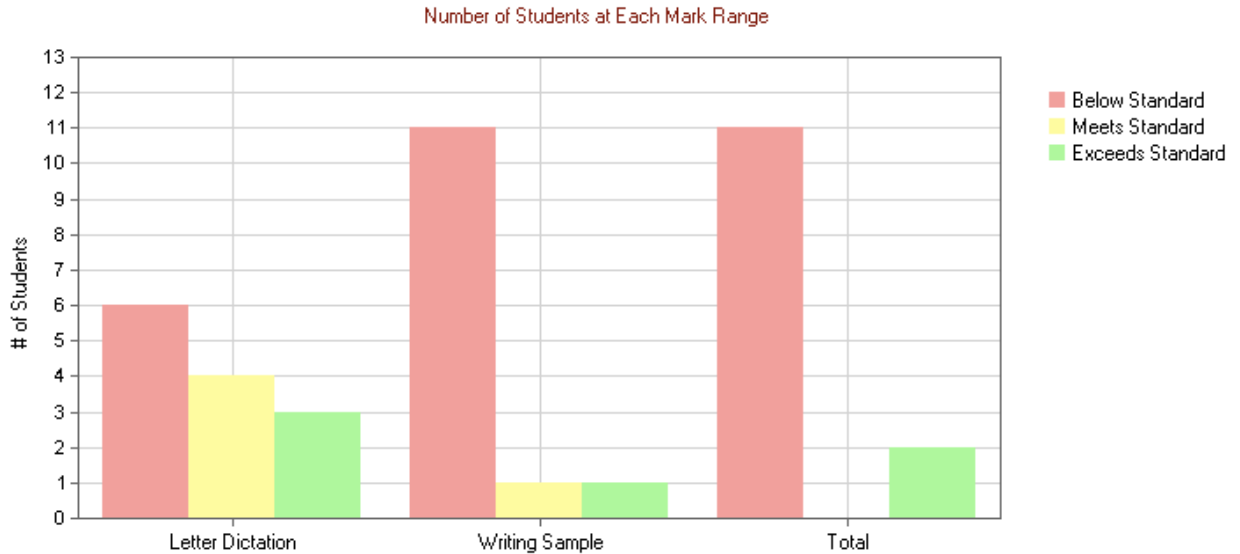
Students shared stories that were personally meaningful in their writing. One student, who wrote just a few sentences at the beginning of the year, wrote a 2-page story in the end of the year writing sample. He felt better about writing and he recognized himself as a writer.

Students were very engaged in A/B partner work. They frequently made positive comments about it. "Working with a partner makes the work easier." "My partner did a good job of that. You should read his sample." "I like helping my partner." "It's fun!" Students spent a good percentage of their class time discussing their learning and looking for evidence of learning.

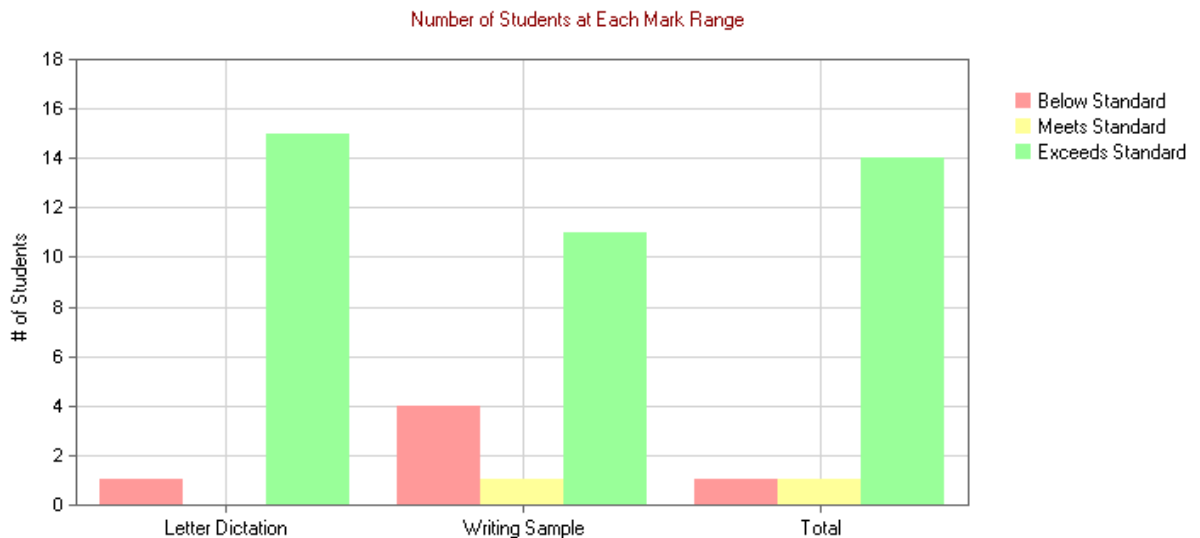
This growth is difficult to graph for the students we are interested in as many of them were already 2 or 3 grade levels behind. However, students who came in made gains equivalent to a year's growth.

### Quantitative Data

The locally developed kindergarten assessment does a good job of showing the writing growth we saw:



The above graph shows the initial writing samples, and the one below shows the end of the year results.



### Reflections/Advice

We learned that we do not all have to work on the same question to have a common focus and improve student learning

We learned that students engage with learning when they help create and are able to reflect on the success criteria.

We learned that having an inquiry focus helped changed the conversation in the staffroom, it focussed more on teaching and learning strategies.

Paying attention to local stories and traditions increased student engagement.

Using team teaching gave us a platform to model dialouge and metacognition. It also allowed students to see teachers as learners.

Next:

- Now that students are aware of their own learning, we would like to go to an inquiry model of learning in order to have deeper learning.
- We wanted to encourage and continue a common language around learning.
- We want to continue to deepen the social-emotional learning to create an even safer learning environment.
- We want to have a more natural use of local knowledge, language and stories in our classrooms.