

NETWORKS OF INQUIRY AND INNOVATION
2011-2012

BELLA COOLA ELEMENTARY
#49 Central Coast

Leadership Team

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School Context/Community Involvement

Bella Coola Elementary is a Preschool to Grade Five school with a student population of 94 students. Our school offers full-day kindergarten and full-day preschool and has a Strong Start centre on site. It is located in the Bella Coola Valley on the central coast of British Columbia. Our community is about 5 hours west of Williams Lake. Sixty-five percent of our students are first nations as we are located in Nuxalk territory. Our school has a small but dedicated Parent Advisory Council (PAC) who is very supportive of our involvement in the Network. This year's study involved 15 Kindergarten students with a wide range of abilities.

School Inquiry and Action

School Question

Will explicit use of the key questions (Where are you going with your learning? How is it going? Where to next?) during writing instruction improve Kindergarten students' ability to write and represent as measured by the Kindergarten Writing Rubric (English Language Arts IRP)?

Strategies

In previous years, the Kindergarten teacher at our school has developed a pictorial set of criteria based on the Kindergarten Writing Rubric as well as a simplified stars and wishes form for peer and self assessment. This year's group of Kindergarten students was introduced to the visual criteria in the fall. For their own pieces of writing, the students were asked to assess their ability to draw a picture which connected to their stories and which included details. As the students' ability to write actual words, phrases and sentences to describe their stories improved, the visual criteria was expanded to include items such as the ability to stretch out words to record prominent sounds or the use of sight words from our word wall. The criteria were used daily as students took turns writing the morning message. As the year progressed, there was less guided support from the teacher.

The Kindergarten teacher attended an NOII meeting in Surrey and visited Hillcrest Elementary to observe first-hand how a school applied assessment for learning strategies such as learning intentions and questioning. Many thanks to Ms. Jensen and the staff for making her visit such a memorable learning experience! The information gained by this visit was shared with colleagues at Bella Coola Elementary and with a student teacher placed in the Kindergarten classroom.

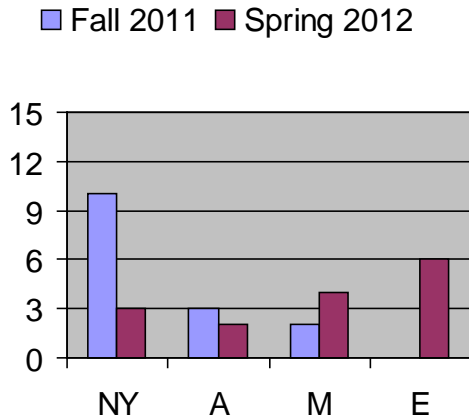
The Kindergarten teacher interviewed individual Kindergarten students to gauge their ability to answer and understand the key questions.

School Findings

The data reflected in the following table and graph was based on the criteria from the spring section of the Kindergarten Writing Rubric found in the English Language Arts IRP. The spring criteria was used both times so that growth could clearly be shown. The Kindergarten Writing Rubric has criteria that change for each term.

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	NY	A	M	E
Fall 2011	10	3	2	0
Spring 2012	3	2	4	6



School Plans for 2012-2013

Next year, I will be able to track the continued growth of many of this year's cohort as the majority of students will be part of the Kindergarten-Grade One class with the same teacher next year. As my school is part of such a small district, I am hoping to make use of technology to include our two isolated coastal schools in some of my school's discussions about the use of assessment for learning strategies and to engage in meaningful dialogue about the unique challenges faced by the teachers at each school and about ways we can support each other.

Continued work on making the key questions and the six strategies a more automatic part of my teaching practice is definitely where my focus needs to be.

Reflections, Advice

My Kindergarten students seemed to find it easy to identify two adults who believed that they would be a success. I wonder if there is an age when this positive outlook changes and what factors lead to those changes. With guided support, most of the Kindergarten students were able to explain what they needed to work on with their next piece of writing using the stars and wishes form as a guide. I found that most of the students answered questions about what we were learning and why in connection to specific criteria we had been discussing rather than with a clear understanding of the big picture. For example, a student might say that he was learning how to use finger spaces but could not give a reason why we were learning to write.

As always, the chance to network with colleagues at NOII meetings and to visit schools where the Network philosophy is a part of the school culture has helped me immensely. I have been helped to see ways that my inquiry can be improved and areas where I am on the right track. The encouragement of Network colleagues has helped me to focus and persevere. It is an experience I would recommend to anyone whether a Network school is across town or across the province!