

NETWORKS OF INQUIRY AND INNOVATION
2011-2012

GLENVIEW ELEMENTARY
#57 Prince George

Leadership Team

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New Staff: Michelle Chapman, Michelle Labonte, Sherri Lambert, Claire Samyciawood and Kent Scheck.

School Context/Community Involvement

At Glenview Elementary, the majority of our teachers have been pursuing and exploring an inquiry approach to learning for the past three years. We believe that we are all at various stages in terms of our understanding about inquiry/project based learning both in terms of our theoretical knowledge and practical applications with students. We know that our understanding and application of Assessment for Learning strategies (AFL) and metacognitive thinking skills have greatly enhanced our ability to explore inquiry/project based learning with each other and with our students. We also know that this is challenging work and work that is more successfully pursued and explored by working together as a team.

This year, we were able to secure release time to collaborate together and explore more deeply, inquiry based learning. Every teacher on staff was interested in participating in this endeavour however, many teachers were new to our school and some teachers had a minimum to moderate understanding of AFL, metacognitive skills and inquiry/project based learning. We knew that by pursuing inquiry/project based learning further, we would need to be mindful and sensitive of where we all were as learners: we needed to find creative and productive ways to support each other and our students as we explored our inquiry question.

School Inquiry and Action

School Question

How will an inquiry-project based approach to learning and the six formative assessment strategies improve student oral language development?

After much discussion, we agreed that we wanted to narrow our focus as it related to inquiry/project based learning so that it could authentically include all learners from Kindergarten to Grade 7. In 2010-2011, we learned from previous assessments based on the BC performance standards that student inquiries and projects resulted in improving skills such as: questioning, note taking, reading for information, organizing information, synthesizing information, and using technology; skills, we agreed, that were often specific to students in Grades 2-7. Therefore, in an effort to include all learners, we decided to focus on oral language development as it related to inquiry/project based learning. We developed the following question to explore this inquiry: "How will an inquiry-project based approach to learning and the six formative assessment strategies improve student oral language development?"

Strategies

Because we had many new teachers, 'veteran' teachers reviewed and presented introductory information about the six AFL strategies at a preliminary meeting. At this same meeting, teachers were invited to complete a self-assessment that provided an opportunity to reflect on their understandings of each strategy, metacognitive skills, and what level/kind of support they would find most helpful to learn and

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implement a strategy(ies) or skill(s) . Although this self-assessment and reflection was voluntary, all teachers willingly completed it and shared their thoughts and challenges.

These assessments provided valuable feedback of where we needed to start as a team. As a result of the feedback, we knew we needed to spend some time reviewing and providing information in the form of short articles about the six strategies. We also knew that it was valuable to share and model many examples of the six strategies and how they could be practically implemented across the grades. The teacher self-assessments also expressed a desire from veteran staff to move forward in their learning, while providing support in a variety of ways to new learners.

The text, *The Art of Inquiry: Questioning Strategies for K-6* by Nancy Lee Cecil (2nd Edition, 2011) was suggested by a team member as a practical resource to further explore inquiry/project based learning. After perusing the book, we agreed as a team that it would be a useful resource and a copy was purchased for every interested teacher. We assigned readings and discussed these readings at our meetings. Later, many team members began to use and share the practical activities and suggestions in the text at future meetings. Some of the adaptations and applications teachers utilized with their students and shared from the text were: improving questioning techniques (e.g. ‘thick’ vs. ‘thin’ questions), gathering important information using various organizers, and using graphic organizers as a visual aid for presentation. Cecil (2011) was divided into chapters that appealed to both primary and intermediate teachers and provided several activities that encouraged students and teachers to “dive in” to an inquiry approach to learning, while other teachers, more confident and adept, explored inquiry/project based learning using technology and other resources.

As new team members gained confidence in their understandings of AFL, metacognitive skills, and inquiry/project based learning and veteran team members continued to move forward with student inquiry, in February 2012, we revisited our NOII inquiry question and determined that we needed to refocus. We discussed as a team, *how* would we measure our students’ oral language development as it related to inquiry/project based learning and *what* oral language skills were involved.

We decided to preview a variety of available oral language rubrics to determine what oral language skills could be involved in presenting an inquiry question or project. As we discussed and thought about these skills, we determined to divide them into oral language skills needed as a presenter, and oral language skills needed as a listener. As a result of this examination we planned to build our own rubric in grade-grouping teams. This proved to be an exciting, challenging, and sometimes overwhelming task! Teachers from Kindergarten to Grade 1 drafted one rubric; teachers from Grade 2-3 drafted another; and teachers from Grade 4-7 drafted a final rubric. The final draft (but still very much a working document!) were completed at the end of March.

School Findings

The drafted rubrics, and more importantly, the discussions and conversations that arose while creating the rubrics contributed to our understanding of the skills involved in the oral presentation of an inquiry/project. We believe that the rubrics provide us with a very useful tool to move forward in our learning of inquiry/project based learning with our students, specifically with regard to the development of oral language skills.

Due to the fact that the drafted rubrics were not created and completed until the spring 2012, we were not able to utilize them to collect any baseline or final data as it related to our inquiry question. Many veteran teachers however, expressed that they found the applicable rubric useful in creating criteria and informal assessments, and in providing descriptive feedback to students with ongoing inquiries/projects for the remainder of the school year.

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School Plans for 2012-2013

Our plan in 2012-2013 is to pursue the same or a similar inquiry question. We feel confident that by having a useful assessment tool that relates to our selected question, we will be able to collect appropriate formal data in the fall and spring. As a team, we have also created a series of Buddy-Coaching Lessons that relate to the presenting and listening skills highlighted in the rubrics. We believe that these coaching lessons will help to improve the skills involved in presenting an inquiry/project for our younger (and older!) learners. Intermediate teachers have expressed that they plan to model and teach these lessons to their students in the fall 2012, and when ready, begin to coach younger students in winter 2013.

Reflections, Advice

This year, we learned that a powerful assessment tool is necessary to provide a framework and direction to pursue and move forward on an inquiry question; and this assessment tool encourages planning with 'the end in mind'. We also learned that by creating a rubric with criteria that 'fit' what we wanted to learn, and by doing so collaboratively, it increased our understanding of what we wanted to know and what our students needed to learn. More importantly, it made a very challenging task less challenging, and resulted in what we are proud to describe as a creative and intelligent assessment tool that we can take ownership of as a team.

Upon reflection, we realized that with many new staff members, our learning this year may have been at times overwhelming despite the encouragement and willingness of teachers to support one another. We also realized that it was at times difficult to balance the needs of teachers who had a more adept knowledge of AFL, metacognitive skills, and inquiry/project based learning with teachers who were very new to these concepts. We believe that the creation of the rubrics helped to bridge this gap through focused and intelligent conversations rich with insight, humour, and connections to practice.