

NETWORKS OF INQUIRY AND INNOVATION
2011-2012

MIRACLE BEACH SCHOOL
#71 Comox Valley

Leadership Team

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School Context/Community Involvement

Miracle Beach Elementary is a small K-7 school with approximately 250 students. Located in Black Creek, a rural, farming area of the Comox Valley, our student population is unexpectedly diverse in its socio-economic make-up and learning needs. Our school is a community of adults and children learning together. We believe that with open communication, mutual respect, and the provision of a safe, caring environment, every child can be successful. This year we have focused on improving our students' writing with the expectation that formative assessment, sound instructional strategies, and universally designed programs embedded in rich community oriented experiences will enhance all students' writing.

School Inquiry and Action

School Question

Will providing students with rich, hands-on local experiences combined with explicit teaching of the 6+1 Writing Traits (while utilizing Assessment for Learning Strategies) increase the achievement of students (as measured by performance standards) and enhance their passion for writing (as measured by student attitudinal survey)?

Focus of Inquiry

We were concerned about many of our students' lack of depth and poor quality of writing (many "and then" writers) and their disengagement when writing. We also wished to better address the increasingly diverse needs in our classrooms. Working as a collaborative school team, we assessed and targeted the needs of learners by offering rich, experiential opportunities for writing.

Strategies

Base line data came from a school-wide write which was scored by individual teachers using rubrics and BC performance quick scales. Class results were displayed on district developed 6+1 writing traits profile sheets. An on-line attitudinal survey to discover the impact of experiential learning coupled with choice writing topics was given to kindergarten to grade 7 students to track student engagement. Staff met every term to examine data, look for trends and develop/plan lessons to address class needs. District Literacy and the school's Diversity Support teachers modeled lessons, lead book studies, and facilitated professional development for staff.

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2011-2012

School Findings

With “rich experiences” as the catalyst for writing, we attempted to provide school-wide, as well as individual grade/class, activities to engage our students. Experiences included: Aboriginal Harvest Festival, Family Literacy Day, trip to bison farm, dairy farm, beach, river to release salmon fry, snowshoeing, Big House, growing potatoes, raising butterflies, building and releasing hot air balloons, dancing to Fiddle Jam, Aboriginal artist, cooking and eating across Canada, entrepreneur fair.

Primary: What we noticed from the data . . .

All primary classes showed improvements in a more narrow focus and adding details to their writing. Lessons that involved Assessment for Learning strategies were most effective. Quality of writing was outstanding when students were provided opportunity to talk about their writing (oral language) and when they wrote from rich experiences. Helping students to think of themselves as writers (author’s chair, cross grade sharing, assembly sharing) was also a means of engagement.

Intermediate: What we noticed from the data . . .

Most areas of organization improved, however further work is needed to help with understanding of paragraphing and use of transition words. Peer and self editing was emphasized and helped students improve and set goals. Providing students with timely feedback in the form of mini-conference and written, specific feedback helped to move students forward as writers. Really good writing was embedded in rich experiences which were often recorded and then revisited in photographs. Celebrating little accomplishments went a long way and helped build confidence. Heritage Fair was a showcase for our writing and a connection with the community.

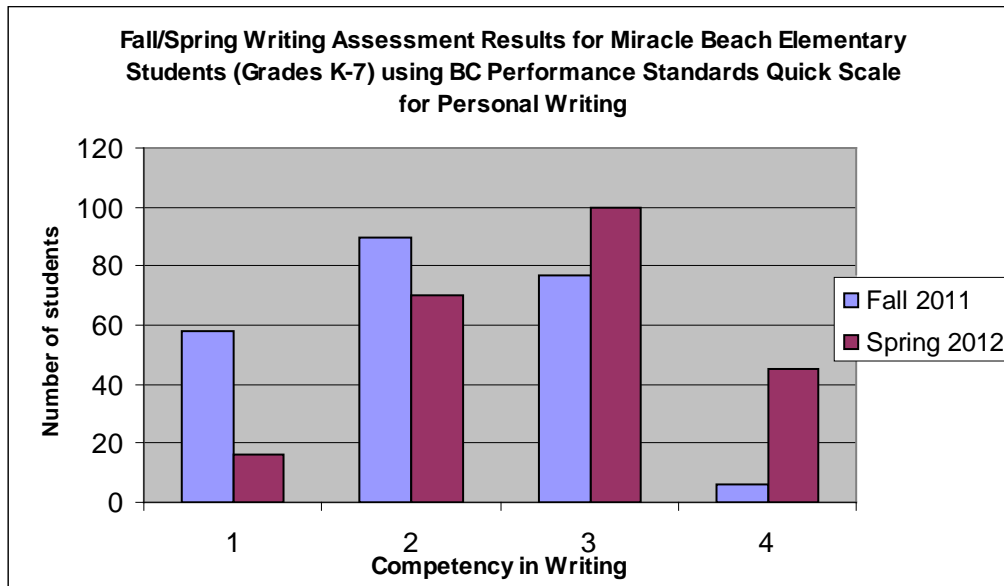
Teacher:

Personal teacher growth was one of the most exciting aspects of this writing journey. One teacher developed a resource that helped staff/students use common language. Another teacher wrote an Assessment for Learning focused, cross-curricular lesson, which helped solidify her own learning and will benefit other teachers as a District Resource. A district/school team piloted an I-pad project which supported student writing. Teachers involved spoke of the confidence and engagement of their learners when utilizing this tool. Teachers appreciated District Literacy Teacher’s modeled lessons and “scripted” brainstorm lessons provided by Diversity Support Teacher for inter-grade groups pre-writing discussions.

Writing Assessment Results for Miracle Beach Elementary Students (Grades K-7) using BC Performance Standards Quick Scale for Personal Writing

	Not Yet Meeting 1	Minimally Meeting 2	Fully Meeting 3	Exceeding 4
Fall 2011	58	90	77	6
Spring 2012	16	70	100	45

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School Plans for 2012-2013

Next Steps as co-created by Writing Team:

We want to continue with *teacher development* and *collaboration* to focus on student *engagement* and *frequency* of writing through the use of *guided instruction*, *scaffolding*, *technology*, and *Assessment For Learning Strategies* to support a *continuum of learning*.

Reflections, Advice

- Partnering with another school more closely would help to gain a deeper understanding and sharing of ideas.
- We will encourage student-use of digital cameras (writing from photos).
- Writing portfolios to follow students – students choose 2-3 samples yearly. Portfolios will help celebrate personal writing successes!
- We need to continue to focus on the conventions of writing. Intermediate teachers especially want lessons to focus on organization of paragraphs and use of transition words.
- Development of a more appropriate attitudinal survey which will glean from children their writing engagement and ensure that data can be looked at for the school in general, as well as by individual classes.