

**NETWORKS OF INQUIRY AND INNOVATION  
2011-2012**

**QUENEESH ELEMENTARY  
#71 Comox Valley**

**Leadership Team**

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**School Context/Community Involvement**

Queneesh Elementary has a student population of 351 students and is located in Courtenay. Two-thirds of the school population participates in the 'neighbourhood' program, a traditional educational program that draws students from a low-socio-economic area. The remaining third of the school is Montessori, a program of choice drawing from a broader catchment area of the Comox Valley.

Our school goals revolve around project based/play based learning as well as executive functioning skills. At the school level, a grade six/seven classes of 22 students in the 'neighbourhood' program, were involved in this inquiry project taught by two teachers. The teachers felt that these students needed something to specifically engage them, involve them in their learning, and foster their self regulation and self direction.

District wide there were five schools involved in this project (Huband Park, Lake Trail, Puntledge Park, Queneesh, and Denman Island). The students involved in this project all in the catchment for Vanier Sr. Secondary. The 'I Can' theme evolved out of the collegial conversations our team of 8 teachers had and suited the needs at all 5 schools. This inquiry gave the students choice but also focused their inquiry on something to help a community.

**School Inquiry and Action**

Social Responsibility and Engagement

**School Question**

Would implementing regularly scheduled 'inquiry' afternoons, culminating in a cross-school celebration, increase student engagement and foster students who are more motivated to be self-directed learners?

**Strategies:**

Personalized pathways are difficult to implement without structural change. Given the freedom to 'implement change' we wondered if setting aside time for inquiry would increase student engagement and better prepare students to be self-directed learners.

We assessed self-regulation and engagement both before and after our inquiry with:

- The social responsibility performance standard rubric
- A pre and post- inquiry 'engagement' survey.

This project was introduced to the students over the month of January by asking them to think about what either bothers them or what are they passionate about. Each student was asked to make a popsicle stick model of something that could solve or represent making a difference to a problem. At the same time teachers guided students with information (videos, guest speakers, news items) that demonstrated how young people helped communities in various ways. They were also challenged to make a difference in lives of five people, create audio-books for special needs students and participate positively in the Queneesh school community.

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The students were then given the Learning Intention: I can engage in a self-designed project that makes a positive impact in our community. They were asked to use their spark and ask themselves what they would like to change in their community. They each had to develop an inquiry question that drove their project and focused their learning. Each student presented their learning journey at a District Showcase to guests from the community, their parents and peers from their own and the other four schools. Each child reflected on their learning in a journal. The video that documents our journey can be seen at <http://vimeo.com/41652366>.

Some student reflections by students when asked what motivates them as a learner:

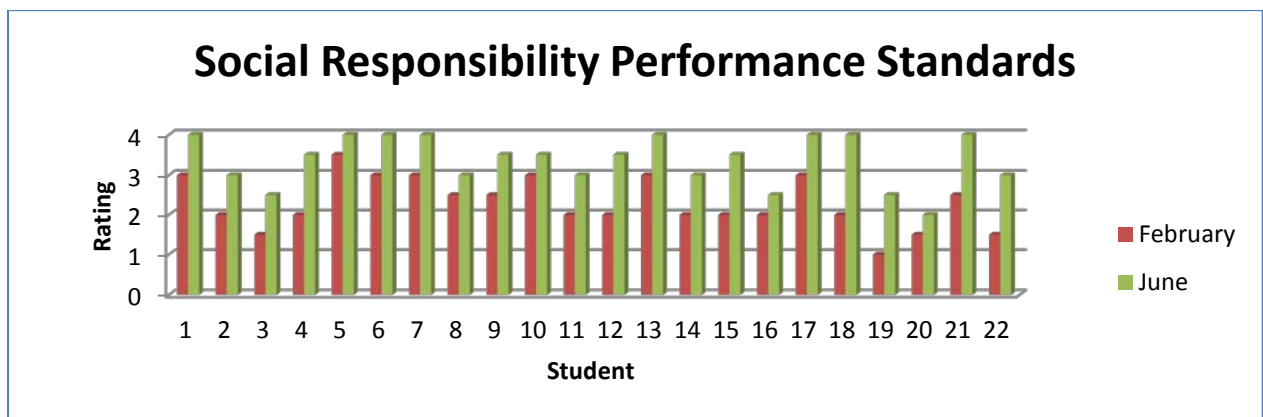
- *feeling good that you have done something, helping other people in some way*
- *What makes me want to learn is having freedom to choose what I want to learn and how I want to learn it. If I am forced to do something I don't want to do I will probably not do as well because I am not enjoying what I am doing.*
- *I enjoy being involved when it's a task that fits my strengths, if it's something my strengths won't shine I will not be as eager to help with the task.*
- *Something that is interesting and fun not something is that incredibly boring*
- *Motivation is hard to find I think you have to find something that is interesting to you, like big projects, like 'i can'.*
- *You can do a project and then come to school the next day and continue where the teachers let you do what you want and it's yours.*

### Partner School

Huband Park Elementary School

### School Findings

	NY		A		M		E	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
February 2012	4	18%	11	50%	7	32%		
June 2012			4	18%	10	45%	8	36%



Pre and Post Survey Results:

We asked the students 16 questions on a pre and a post goggle apps survey. Although there was not marked improvement on the responses to all questions, there were several areas that stood out. The student's responses indicate that they:

- *Were more excited about their learning*
- *Had more choice in what they were learning*

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- *Were learning in a way that works for them*
- *Had experienced needed to 'be dragged away from their learning because they liked it so much'*
- *Can break a project into steps*
- *Were able to reflect on their learning*
- *Didn't need the teacher as much to keep them working.*

These areas indicate that these students are thoughtfully constructing an inquiry around their own choices and are interested enough to keep working without the teacher hanging over them. This was confirmed by teacher's anecdotal observations.

### **School Plans for 2012-2013**

Our team has applied for a Collaborative Action Research Grant with the hopes that we can use it to extend and continue to pursue 'Inquiry Afternoons' and collaboration. We would like to expand our work further within our school as well as across the district. Queneesh has scheduled three showcases for the 2012/2013 school year and has embedded collaborative time at the school level with a common prep time for enrolling teachers.

### **Reflections, Advice**

Our school and cross district results were positive on many levels. This project allowed us to really get to know our student's strengths and sparks, and to really deepen the trust in our classroom community. It also allowed the students to engage in something meaningful to them in a real way. They had to push themselves to develop their inquiry, dig deeply, pursue community members, ask questions, take action and prepare a powerful presentation.

This kind of open ended inquiry, although very engaging, takes time to set up properly. We had to let some outcomes go and really focus on guiding the students. Younger students may have difficulty with the 'open-endedness' of this form of inquiry. Picking an appropriate inquiry question for each group of students must be given thoughtful consideration.