



## 2014 - 2015 AESN Case Study

**School:** Skeena Middle School    **District:** #82 Coast Mountains

**Area of Focus:** Student Level Inquiry

**Inquiry Team Members:** Phillip Barron, Surinder Dhaliwal, Sonja Donnan, Kerry Fraser, Dani Shinde

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**Our focus for this year:** Our focus needs to be on engagement-social, institutional and intellectual. We need to provide students with relevant and engaging activities in the classroom to increase their connection to school. Our concentration in this area of focus will be to further our work together as a school community.

**Scanning:** It has become apparent that many of our students are disengaged from their learning. We see this through our attendance data, the number of students not completing and/or handing in assignments, and anecdotal observations by staff. In the 2013/2014 school year, all our staff completed an At-Risk survey identifying approximately 13% of our student population as being at-risk in multiple areas and approximately 18% as being at-risk in the area of academic achievement. We will be tracking these cohorts at each grade level.

**Focus:** It is our hope that together we can develop and build capacity to plan and implement engaging methods, lessons, projects, and activities for the middle school learner.

**Hunch:** We believe that one of the largest factors contributing to this situation is difficulty students are having identifying the relevance of the curriculum to their lives. It appears to us as if students do not see the connection to what they are learning/doing and their present and/or future.

**New professional learning:** We had access to a number of professional books and articles, as well as several professional development/in-service events (Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser, Faye Brownlie [in Smithers], Chris Weber, Tom Hierck). Common preparation time in our school allowed for meaningful conversations.

**Taking action:** A grade 7 Pod of Mrs. Shinde, Mrs. Fraser and Mrs. Donnan used Inquiry based learning strategies to cover curriculum topics in their CORE classes. Students learned how to distinguish a "BIG IDEA" and what they call "BIG QUESTIONS". Several lessons were presented on questioning, note taking and choosing good research sources. After these lessons students came up with their own Inquiry questions to explore more deeply. In collaboration with the grade 7 Pod, learner support staff facilitated strategies (student choices, mixed grouping, making connections to experiences, student participated in setting criteria, student feedback, and self- evaluation) and implemented appropriate interventions with individual students who needed extra support during the inquiry process.

**Checking:** The grade 7 POD had all student questions approved by a teacher in their first "learning conference". Students gathered all evidence of their learning in a "learner portfolio" which they used for assessment purposes at reporting time. Throughout the inquiry process, students met with their peers for additional learning conferences where they shared ideas, resources, and gave feedback to one another. These conferences were beneficial because students started to make connections between their questions and something that their neighbor was researching, and therefore expanded their own understanding of the topic. After several weeks of research, students decided how they wanted to present their learning to the class. Presentations demonstrated what the students had learned so far, while emphasizing that true inquiry never really ends. Students were encouraged to think about "what's next?" and include those ideas in their presentations.

**Evidence:**

- 100% participation! All students completed a project.
- Students self- reported an increased amount of time exploring topics on their own time.
- Increased recollection of information learned long after completion of assignment.
- P.E. choices resulted in higher participation in all classes

The grade 7 pod was encouraged by their student participation rate in all areas of inquiry.

**Reflections/Advice:** We learned that students were more engaged when given a choice of their own. Students started to think about what is next and kept on questioning and spiraling. In September the pod will conduct a scan of students and then decide if they will continue the same inquiry process or adapt it. The advice our pod would give is to ask lots of question when doing an inquiry based project and enjoy the journey!