

2014 - 2015 NOII Inquiry Case Study



School Name: Brechin Elementary **District:** #68 Nanaimo Ladysmith

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Our focus area: How will the implementation of specific self-regulation strategies affect the written output of my struggling learners?

Scanning: Our school is an inner city school comprised of many low-income families. There are many at risk students in the focus class. Many are coming from homes that are in constant turmoil, and/or they are economically challenged (INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES ARE RECOGNIZED). Some of these students have great difficulty getting their ideas down on paper during the writing process. They will often sit for great lengths of time and end up only being able to get a couple sentences down on paper, even though they have some great ideas. They also come to class unable to calm themselves and express how they are feeling (LEARNERS AT THE CENTER). This leads to extreme frustration with both their work and peer relationships (LEARNING IS SOCIAL). After attending a workshop in the fall about Social Thinking, one team member was introduced to the idea that executive functioning and written output are linked. This is where the idea began to form for this inquiry project.

Focus: We decided to focus on the principle: Learners are both metacognitive and self-regulated. Our school was one of a handful of focus schools this year in our district. We were luckily provided with extra support, which helped to facilitate this process. Our students are lacking so many basic adaptive skills that it is extremely important for them to learn strategies to help them regulate and understand their emotions in order to be successful academically.

Hunch: Change can be challenging. For many years adults in our school (teachers and support staff) believed that students should arrive at school ready to learn and that self regulation strategies are innate. We were continuing to see more and more behavior issues and students unable to identify their emotions or the consequences of their actions. There has also been a decline in academic achievement at the same time. So as a team we began to look at incorporating self-regulation strategies into everyday teaching. We decided to assume that they all come without these skills and work with them as a whole class to introduce different strategies to help them manage their emotions and peer relationships. The hunch was that this might have an impact on the written output of students at the same time.

New professional learning: As stated earlier this inquiry started after attending the Social Thinking conference in Richmond last fall. One of the keynote speakers was Sarah Ward. She first shared the link between written output and executive functioning, which I believe falls under the umbrella of self-regulation. She provided some excellent examples of strategies to teach this to students. Since there was already a push to implement self-regulation in our school, I quickly became interested and formed a small team for this inquiry project. This led to many professional readings and programs that were brought into the classroom used for this project.

Taking action: There were many actions taken during the course of this inquiry. There were structured writing classes focusing on specific writing skills that continued throughout the year. The students were introduced to a “working clock” along with a “get ready, do, done” planning strategy. This allowed students to understand how to plan how much time would be needed to complete tasks and then provide a visual of the passing of time on actual clock. This was to help them manage their time more wisely. Students were guided through lessons from the programs Zones of Regulation and Connected and Respected. Students had a check in system in the morning and after breaks, which helped them identify which zone they were in. The class took part in weekly class meetings, which included a sharing circle. The team members were able to come into the class to see some of these in action. Students were taught how to organize their materials so that it was easily accessible and neat. There was also the introduction of assisted technology through the use of mini ipads and laptops for written output.

Checking: We used the writing performance standards as a measuring tool. In October students participated in a whole class write where they were all given the same topic. Students were able to brainstorm with a partner their ideas and then share with the class. They used a planning sheet to get their ideas quickly down and then were given 30 minutes to write freely. The same process with a similar topic was used again in late May. After reviewing the performance standards and comparing the students writing samples from October to May we found that there were no significant gains made other than the growth you would expect to see during a school year.

The struggling writers were able to write a larger amount, but it is not clear if that is due to the self-regulation strategies or the technology that was used. We believe this may be due to not spending enough time on further executive functioning strategies, or not having a thorough enough understanding of the connection between the two. But, there were some significant gains made in other areas. Most noticeably were with peer relationships. There was a marked decrease in behavior issues amongst the classmates during recess. When issues occurred, students were able to articulate their feelings and help come up with possible situations.

Students began seeking ways to become leaders in the school. Many volunteered to help out with the primary students at recess by being mentors. The class decided that there was an issue with garbage outside, and organized a school litter pick-up rotation amongst the classes. This left us feeling that even though our original hunch was not correct there was much gained by completing this inquiry project.

Reflections/Advice: This inquiry ended up leading us in a direction that was totally unexpected. We started off looking at the impact of self-regulation on writing and ended up discovering the importance of teaching self-regulation to foster confidence and good citizens. This has sparked a passion for the lead teacher of this inquiry, Catherine. She is furthering what she learned from this process by attending a two day conference with Sarah Ward in the fall. She is hoping to gather more information about the connection between written output and executive functioning. She participated in a workshop called ‘Tribes Learning Communities’ that will be put into practice during the next school year. This will also be a focus for the entire school next year as well. It has also lead to some more professional readings about class meetings and how to effectively incorporate them into a daily routine. Our advice is to definitely look into incorporating teaching self-regulation skills to your students. They have more of an effect then we ever anticipated.