



2014 - 2015 NOII Inquiry Case Study

School: Errington Elementary **District:** #69 Qualicum

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Inquiry Question: What school wide practices should we explore to enable students to demonstrate self-regulation in our learning community?

Scanning: What is going on for our learners?

Staff at Errington Elementary school have noticed that many students are exhibiting challenges with regulating their emotions, thoughts and behaviours in the school setting. Stuart Shakers work suggests that self-regulation is an important skill for children to develop. Students that are able to pay attention to classroom activities, ignore distractions, remember instructions long enough to successfully carry out a task and resist impulses are skills that are related to academic and social success.

Focusing: What does our focus need to be?

There is a desire to keep students at the center of our professional actions in a way that is meaningful and supports deep learning but is sensitive to the compressed school year. For this reason we chose to adopt a model of inquiry that has been successful for CRYR (Changing results for young readers). This strategy has participating staff members pick ONE child to focus on in relation to self-regulation. The aim to determine if various school wide self-regulation strategies enhance that particular child's self-regulation skills.

Hunch: Teachers are familiar with directly teaching strategies for cognitive challenges but strategies to promote self-regulation in the past were assumed to be innately known and not directly taught. If staff directly teaches their "target" student (and the class) how to use various tools and strategies then students we hopefully be more likely to use the tools/strategies in an appropriate manner.

New professional learning:

- Three team members went to Dr. Lynn Miller's workshop in Port Alberni on anxiety in children and how anxiety impacts a child's ability to self-regulate.
- Our school based PD day looked at trauma in children (Calmer Classrooms Article) and the impact that trauma has on social-emotional development and self-regulation.
- Team members met on Tuesdays at lunch for professional conversations of what they were experimenting with in their class and the impact it had on student learning. These ongoing conversations were seen as the most valuable as they kept our conversation moving forward and created a safe environment where inquiry members could be curious and

collaborative. These ongoing conversations also strengthened professional staff relationships because of our collective goal.

- Check-Ins also occurred at bi-monthly staff meetings so that colleagues that were not part of the inquiry group could be informed of what new learning was happening with the inquiry group.
- Two inquiry members observed/participated in yoga in one of the inquiry member's classrooms as a way of showing how it could be incorporated into a daily routine.
- Various breathing techniques were demonstrated by several inquiry members of simple ways to promote mindfulness and calm into a classroom. A youtube clip was also shared at a staff meeting to invite others into trying out some new ideas.

Taking Action: Colleagues met and discussed their target students and what was going on in their classes. It became apparent that in the past most of our energy and resources were expended on students that needed to “move/wiggle” while learning. In discussing our target students it was discovered that many students struggle with visual input and auditory stimulus in addition to needing fidgets and movement breaks. Inquiry members were curious about light filters and the impact it would have on creating a calmer environment. Both blue and white light filters were purchased and are currently being tested in seven classrooms. Noise cancelling headphones were also purchased and being utilized successfully by several “target” students.

There was a concerted effort to directly teach students that fidgets were “tools not toys” and a heightened awareness of using language that gave students the power to self-advocate and understand what was going on with their bodies and brains when they were in a heightened state. The conversations by the end of the year shifted from “how” to teach self-regulation strategies to “why” some students struggle and others do not. There was an increased interest on the correlation of trauma in childhood and the ability to self-regulate.

At Errington School we feel that we know our students well and we function as a community. Weekly discussions strengthened our belief that having students have multiple adults in the building that they were connected to aided in their social-emotional development. Errington School is known to have a high-needs learning population and most teachers choose to teach at Errington because the work is professionally satisfying due to a curious professional staff that is open to new learning.

Checking:

- We will know that we are making a difference by what is reported in the staff meeting check-ins.
 - Check Ins were valuable in the small group conversations that were held at lunch. Since the whole staff wasn't participating, check ins at staff meetings were not as helpful as there was not the time to go deeper into the “what's happening” and “where to next as not all staff were involved in the inquiry although the invitation to join was always available. Most teachers felt that giving students the language to describe their feelings was as/or more important than purchased resources. The ongoing PD that members participated in (Calmer Classrooms, trauma and the Anxiety Workshop) was valuable in providing insight into why this behaviour might be occurring. Collectively we were aware that our lens for viewing and understanding certain behaviours was shifting. As a group we acknowledged that attributing behaviour to anxiety or trauma had a profound impact on how we approached our students. The performance standards (social responsibility) was used by some to track various students. This is an area that we need to do some more work on as we realized that not everyone was interpreting the quick scales in the same manner.

- Some teachers may wish to track a targeted behaviour that relates to self-regulation. (Frequency of 'breaks', frequency of use of fidgets, chew tools).
 - General information was shared and there were some trends that were observed.
 - Students that needed a tactile/chewing sensation to self-regulate seemed to be the easiest to satisfy and showed an almost immediate impact on behaviour in a positive way but the impact was short lived. This is a "wonder" that we wish to explore further.
 - Students that were overly stimulated by noise found noise cancelling headphones to be a useful tool. The acceptance of these learning tools by others was positive as pre-loading of why different learners need different things was thoughtfully presented prior to introducing the interventions. The purchased headphones will stay with the students that used them successfully this year.
 - There was an increase in interest of about how bodies react to stress. Our leadership students also started to assemble "mindful" tool kits for others to use.

We noticed that our language shifted in our discussions about how we spoke about students. We also realized that we have just begun. There was a greater self-awareness amongst educators that changing our behaviour was key to successful student outcomes. The greatest gift of having colleagues discussing self-regulation/mindfulness on a regular basis was that by making check-ins at lunch a priority we gently reminded each other of our collective goals. Collectively, we have realized that we need to slow down, breathe, and continue to be curious about what a child is trying to communicate through their behaviour. By teaching students we have taught ourselves how to model the behaviour that we seek in our students in a sustained, authentic, job-embedded way. We are fortunate at Errington School that all but one of the inquiry group members will be returning to EES in the fall so our collective learning can continue. We have a change in leadership at our school and we believe that our new administrator will be supportive of the inquiry group.

Reflections/Advice: Creating a space where our group could meet without interruptions at lunch was key to our success. We met in the library at lunch with the expectation that those that could make it would. Due to reconfiguration our staff composition had changed drastically from the year before. Having an inquiry group with a focus created a safe place to learn and get to know our colleagues. We believed that it helped that most inquiry members were familiar with the, "Spiral of Inquiry" and most planned to stay at EES the following year. We also were appreciative of the support we received from student support and our formal leader (Bobbi Coleman) in valuing our work.