

2014-2015 NOII Inquiry Case Study



School: Nakusp Secondary School **District:** #10 Arrow Lakes

Inquiry Team Members: Julia Flesaker and Natasha Miles

Our focus area: Will using geographic principles to assess impacts and consequences of student decisions and interactions on a global scale affect student views regarding environmental sustainability and cultural viability?

Scanning: I have a very small class of Geography 12 students. Most of them are not academic students and I have some of Aboriginal descent as well. The focus of this course is to create an appreciation for Geography as a topic and foster interest in students. After the fundamentals of the curriculum have been covered, students have requested a focus on world issues and cultural geography. These areas tie in nicely with the fundamentals and give the opportunity for inquiry.

Focus: The principle of learning that we focused on was “learners at the center”. This area is very important to our students because many of them were nervous about taking an academic elective and I want them to understand and experience success in the classroom. I want them to leave Geography 12 feeling like their actions can and do make a difference. They can be a driving force of change in our world.

Hunch: Students have just completed grade 10 Science or Social Studies 11 where a lot of memorization and practice testing take place in order to prepare for provincial exams. Students are nervous to take academic electives because of past experience. A number of my students felt that they were not smart enough to take this course, which is entirely untrue. There was an extreme lack of confidence. We thought that this could change if we allowed flexibility and choice in assignments. We did project based learning. We empowered students to find local problems at the community or school level and suggest changes that could be made to improve social or environmental wellbeing.

New professional learning: Geography 12 is a new course for me and I learned a lot about the topic with the students. We delved into global issues and examined how we could make a difference at a local and personal level. We focused on supporting learners who doubted their abilities and lacked confidence in meeting expectations.

Taking action: Students chose focus areas for geographic topics. Students developed actionable proposals for improving the sustainability of our school through composting,

recycling, energy savings, school gardens and outdoor classrooms. Student proposals will be presented to staff in September and hopefully we will be able to move forward on a number of them. The students really felt like these proposals would make a positive change in our school and that they could make a difference even on an individual level.

Checking: Making students part of the decision making process governing the direction of learning gave them a sense of control and empowerment. Since students were informing the direction of the course through reflections and discussion, they were invested in what they were learning and keen to participate. The course's direction was fluid and changed to suit student needs and interests. All of the students remained in and successfully completed the course.

Reflections/Advice: Writing proposals is an effective way to facilitate student inquiry. Proposal writing is a real world skill and results in a tangible product. I would do proposal writing again in my classroom, but the end of the year is not a great time to complete them. It would be nice if the proposals could be acted upon while the students are still in the course.