

2014 - 2015 NOII Inquiry Case Study



School: Ucluelet Elementary **District:** #70 Alberni

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Our focus area: Intermediate Literacy. Particularly increasing quality in writing and representing with students in grades 4-7.

Scanning: For the past two years we have focused on “increasing engagement” as a goal with the outcome being more valid and authentic writing experiences for our students. The first year of our inquiry we created a model for intermediate literacy time where we made small groupings (10 students) per teacher and created a system of units that were highly engaging and hands on for the students. This proved a huge success and everyone enjoyed the literacy model. Last year we explored gender and the role pre-discussion plays in writing. We found when students were grouped during literacy time based on gender their conversations were more deeply rooted and thus their writing was deeper. We found, however, that the actual physical act of writing was very much an added effort for many students and in particular special needs students.

Focus: We wanted to explore the use of technology this year with our literacy model and see if using assistive technology with all students would increase the quality and quantity of writing after the highly engaging topics were taught.

Hunch: We believed that if we had a class set of laptops we could teach the students “Set BC” technology to all and make available the use of laptops for all writing activities. We believed that by skipping the traditional pre-writing model and have students jump right to writing on a computer they would feel more empowered to take risks with their writing as they would not be so worried about spelling and mechanics.

New professional learning: 1) we acquired a class laptop cart and placed it in in an intermediate classroom with a sign out sheet on top. The other two intermediate classes had equal access to the laptops. 2) Our entire team had a professional learning day with SET BC trainer, Jane Rondeau. She taught us to use google apps on our new lap tops, did a refresher on Kurzweil and helped us to use our smart boards in conjunction with the laptops. 3) One of our team members was chosen to join a technology team with our district to report on our

project with the district and glean new methods and ideas from the district team. This team met every other month for the year.

Taking action: As a team we had several release days to collaborate and discuss assessment (do pre-writing activities and group marking using performance scales). We then discussed what areas needed to be focused on. We used excellence in writing as a universal program with all intermediate classes while in a whole class setting. We also taught “Typing Pal” as a universal class lesson weekly. Then we divided up the groups for our “interesting and engaging” literacy circles four days a week for one hour. We introduced a few new ideas and some ideas that we used in the past. These included Novel lit circles with all groups having a common theme (this year friendship), Van Isle 360 – where students mapped the boats coming around the island, wrote to the boats and then hand delivered their letters to the sailboats when they arrived. This they found very exciting and engaging. Having students use their laptops this year made a huge difference in many students. Many chose to use assistive technology (speech to text, read back options) to help them with getting their ideas down and then checking to see that it made sense.

Checking: Our final collaboration day saw teachers working together in teams to assess, using performance standards, the final writing piece we chose to use to compare with the start of the year writing by students. By far all teachers reported students wrote more interesting and detailed pieces about their topic. Students learned many writing styles including, writing a research piece, writing letters, writing stories, writing responses to reading. Most teachers reported that they could tell the students that were introduced to these last year as their writing improved leaps and bounds, whereas the new students to our school were just emergent in their style and risk taking.

Reflections/Advice: We learned that this is working! We are so excited about next year and the opportunities. We have decided to go back to the first year ideas that our students who are now going into grade 7 will only barely remember. We made this decision as we are aware that next year we will have many new staff working on this project that have not been part of the whole process from the beginning. The main teacher who has been a true teacher leader will not be part of this and we are going to go with what we know worked from past years. We will keep the laptop cart again this year and continue to learn about the possibilities these have as tools for writing.