



## 2014-2015 AESN Case Study

**School:** David Hoy Elementary    **District:** #91 Nechako Lakes

**Area of Focus:** Student Level

**Inquiry Team Members:** Eileen Bennison, Susan Burck, Marilyn Gammon

**Inquiry Question:** Will inquiry based learning help students develop reading and writing skills and engage all our learners more? We are focusing on creating knowledge, telling stories, team teaching and including Carrier language in all spaces.

We started the year with a focus on building a community of learners, but adapted as we grew to learn more about our students. We continued to build on the community of learners, but realized we needed to also continue to focus on communications skills, particularly helping our students understand the importance of being able to discuss orally and share views and learn practicing the oral tradition of our Aboriginal community.

**Scanning:** Over the past three years David Hoy staff have participated in an inquiry that has helped us to examine our instructional practice and to focus on own instruction and learning. We are hoping that by developing student led inquiry our students will be filled with purpose and commitment.

Sometimes the background knowledge we would like our students to have is missing, but everyone does have a story and a connection. It is important to provide an appropriate time and place to share stories and *to scaffold this into our academic curriculum*. Also, we noticed that many students come in with low language and reading and we really work hard to meet them where they are at, to celebrate gains, and to focus less on their academic deficits.

During 2014-2015 we increased student performance in reading and writing but lost some of our focus on reading locally developed Aboriginal stories (we lost our focus as we became more student centered and aware of needs). We were able to self monitor and readjust our thinking – especially as we focused on developing competencies rather than content. Students were participating in constant inquiry, but often it was lead by educators and designed around strategy learning and competencies. Differentiated learning outcomes were easily accommodated because the role of content has shifted and emphasis has been placed on the competencies.

Educators used the increased focus on oral language and oral presentation strategies; pulling common themes to weave the AFL strategies and directed inquiry.

Educators worked to deliberately include the understandings that deepened student questioning (for example, the bridge design unit). Educators were able to communicate that mistakes are necessary in order to learn.

**Focus:** Students are participating in inquiry as a group. We selected water as our basis for inquiry for our second year. We notice many of our students' stories are about water, salmon, camping, and the lake that we live on. We use it to teach the Carrier language to conduct inquiries, to teach reading, and to teach Social Studies and Science.

At this point we felt that problem-based learning was more appropriate because it better met the needs for our learners and our need to ensure that strategy and skill development.

**Hunch:** This is our fourth year participating in this spiral, and we are pleased to say that while we still see the need to create an inclusive classroom each year and the need to strive for academic success, we have learned to look for progress through formative assessment and to meet students where they are at as opposed to focusing on perfection. There will always be a need for change, and we will always strive to meet district goals, but we are becoming more comfortable with changing our practices based on formative assessments. We deal with students who live in poverty or who lack self-regulation. Being involved in the inquiry helps us see the need to change our practice to deal with issues and support each other as we navigate these changes.

In grade four the teacher co-created formative assessment criteria with the students around oral language. Students deepened the conversation about their own learning, self assessing and peer assessing using positive language. During learning students asked each other meaningful questions, and were able to share knowledge about content, and learning strategies.

Students were able to share personal experiences around the topic and this deepened the learning experience.

Educators developed a deeper understanding of the inquiry process by becoming increasingly diagnostic when assessing. This enabled teachers to pinpoint areas of learning need, and students who were able to share learning were given coaching roles.

**New learning:** Students are developing deeper questioning techniques, and are becoming more engaged as they feel a stronger ownership over learning and feelings of success. We continue to explore structure and guided inquiry, assessing students and teaching skills as they are required. We are hoping that we are moving our students from acquiring skill sets to applying skill sets.

One of the effective outcomes was the learning at the point of failure – kids learn what learning is all about – through the bridge building inquiry students in grade four were asked what is causing failure in their bridge structures and how could they improve that. Students identified what wasn't working and creative ways to solve problems. The students were able to accept mistakes and diagnose and correct as part of the learning.

Our understandings of local history deepened. The role of oral language history – reading through journals and finding small bits of references to the pit houses – created interest in local traditions. The students read a local author/anthropologist (R. Mitchell) journaling about the

local history - stories ran through oral language – residents don't remember pit houses, they remember log houses. This historical learning is almost lost and students have been able to share information.

One of the classroom teachers, Marilyn Gammon, has started a blog discussing ways students are exploring local history, in addition to other forms of shared learning. Educators are exploring ways to develop oral language as it is used traditionally as keepers of the stories. There is a general reluctance in the community to share - it is difficult to access history through oral language when members of the community are unwilling to work with students. Educators are discussing ways to ensure Aboriginal Learning is taking place in a respectful environment.

**Taking action:** Students are participating in inquiries about the lake. They are involved in salmon hatching, investigating the life cycles that the lake supports. Teachers continue to work in a team approach, pushing in with support rather than pulling out. As well, educators continue to develop, alongside students and community members questions that students are willing to investigate.

Actions that students have been involved in have been described above...they have actively been involved in a learning journey this year and have acquired the language that enables them to discuss what has been learned.

Focusing on putting the *students in the center of the learning* is becoming easier and easier for these educators as they are learners themselves, continuously seeking ways to improve pedagogy and change the learning environment and learning experiences. These teachers have broadened their abilities to assess and use that assessment to inform instruction. The inquiry is embedded throughout the year, just as the First Peoples Principles of Learning have become embedded in the classrooms.

**Checking:** We will use a measure of engagement and a literacy snapshot as assessment tools. We are asking our students to become more reflective and interactive with the learning processes as well as content – ability to discuss learning will be an assessment.

We need to develop a better engagement scoring guide. We have been using a draft version of an engagement guide but it is not meeting our needs in our context. In terms of changing the learning experiences we are able to identify changes in our classrooms that indicate success:

- a high level of student engagement
- improving academic achievement results
- increasing successful participation in tasks

**Next Steps:**

- develop coaching strategies so that educators are able to share learning with other schools