



2015-2016 NOII Case Study

School: École North Oyster Elementary

District: #68 Nanaimo Ladysmith

Inquiry Team Members:

Simon Brink

Jacqueline Catchpole

Zoe Dusting

Alison Eathorne

Pamela Ellis

Helen Fall

Belinda Harrison

Marylee Holmes

Tegan Jaszczyszyn

Katie Loos

Cheryl Lowrence

Patrice Mauriks

Paul Mitchell

Camille Paradis

Jennifer Robinson

Leanne Sanford

Jane Saunders

Contacts:

simon.brink@sd68.bc.ca

Jacqueline.catchpole@sd68.bc.ca

zoe.dusting@sd68.bc.ca

Alison.eathorne@sd68.bc.ca

pamela.ellis@sd68.bc.ca

hfall@sd68.bc.ca

Belinda.harrison@sd68.bc.ca

mholmes@sd68.bc.ca

Tegan.jaszczyszyn@sd68.bc.ca

kloos01@sd68.bc.ca

Cheryl.lowrence@sd68.bc.ca

pmauriks@sd68.bc.ca

paul.mitchell@sd68.bc.ca

Camille.paradis@sd68.bc.ca

Jennifer.robinson@sd68.bc.ca

lsanford@sd68.bc.ca

jsaunders@sd68.bc.ca

Our focus for this year: Our focus was strengthening our sense of community at École North Oyster through Eco-education and Aboriginal Understandings.

Scanning: We noticed that English program students (mostly from the Chemainus First Nation Territory, Yellow Point and Cassidy area) play only with other English students and the French Immersion students (majority from Ladysmith) also stick together. Students from the two programs and two communities were not mixing very often. Some students were complaining about students from the other program. These behaviours were the most “obvious” to new staff members who had never been in a dual track school before.

Some of our other observations were that many students were keen to explore the large field, the expansive forest and wanted to explore the pond more. Also our Parent Advisory Council (PAC) had asked if the staff were interested in taking steps towards being an Eco-school. This was an important community perspective to keep in mind.

To make our scanning more evidence based and not just anecdotal, we developed a Likert scale questionnaire to administer in fall/winter and then again in May to determine how students were feeling before and after our “Explorer Groups” and other classroom interventions. In this questionnaire we had four categories of questions: connections, our playground, Aboriginal understandings and the Four Inquiry Questions.

We included the four key questions in our Likert Scale Questionnaire. We had discussed having every teacher poll three random students as well as using the four key questions, but we didn’t end up acting on that.

We designed a student interview form using the four questions and relating it to our nature education, Aboriginal understandings. The Inquiry and Innovation teacher then spent a full day interviewing eight students for the grade 2-7 classes to get more in-depth feedback.

After the initial Likert Scale results were in we noticed:

- The majority of students felt safe outside at school.
- The majority of students liked to play in our school forest and enjoyed visiting the pond.
- There was a difference in how students in the two programs felt about each other.

During Professional Learning Community (PLC) while we were discussing what we wanted to implement to help build community the following principles were foremost on our minds:

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits and the ancestors.
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place.)

Focus: As noted in the “Scanning” section above, during the month of September, students commented that at recess they thought they couldn’t play with students in the other language program. Also teachers who had been at École Davis Road, where the school community was very connected and strong, really noticed that this connection amongst the students was still lacking here. We also had three new-to the school teachers in the English Program. Only two English teachers were the same as last year and only one remaining from before the merge of two schools. We all had a real sense of wanting to build community. We also wanted to give the immersion students, mostly from town in Ladysmith, the chance to feel more connected to our school site and neighbourhood.

Our school setting, with its natural beauty, rural setting, and close proximity to the Stz’uminus First Nation Reserve, makes our school unique. We thought it was the perfect launching point for our linked Inquiry Projects.

Students are very active outside and teachers want to build upon this interest in the natural part of the school environment to provide more opportunities for bonding. In addition, as part of this engagement with the school’s natural environment, we also want to engage students in learning more about Aboriginal understandings of nature. We would also like to give sharing opportunities to Aboriginal students and their families so our school community can benefit from their knowledge and understandings of our environment.

Hunch: In June 2014, École Davis Road was closed. At that time teachers were on a job action at the end and start of the next year. For that reason, there was not much time for closure or effective transition to École North Oyster. During the 2014-2015 school year there were 12 divisions where there had been only four before. This was a dramatic change for all concerned. For the first time French Immersion students were being bussed to school and English Program students had their cozy school “invaded.” There is also a very large disparity between the two communities within our school. Socio-Economics is a prime factor in this. For example, in the immersion classes there may be one or two students who cannot afford school supplies or hot lunches but in the English classes it is usually more than 50% but closer to 80%. In addition, École North Oyster has approximately 16% of its school population composed of students with First Nations ancestry. It is important to incorporate Aboriginal understandings into the school community to ensure school is inclusive of all students’ backgrounds.

We have many different communities of learners within our four walls. At the start of this 2015-2016 school year, teachers recognized the need for continuing to developing the sense of community at our school.

New professional learning:

- We held our first school based professional learning on the Spirals of Inquiry using Halbert and Kaser's Spirals of Inquiry book.
- Our Education Assistants (EA) used PLC time to read "Lost at School" which favours building community through "Collaborative Positive Solutions" (a form of collaborative problem solving)
- Teaching Staff participated in a school wide professional development, based on "Lost at School"
- Professional Learning Group/Book Club for the majority of staff to read and discuss the book, "Last Child in the Woods"
- Classroom teachers and their students participated in:
 - "Eco School" sessions with Erik Piikkila
 - Build A Whale (A full Offshore Orca Whale Skeleton provided by Strawberry Isle. (Students learn about orcas, examine the skeleton and reassemble it)
 - Poultry in Motion Big Barn visit
 - Many teachers attended the "Going Home Star" ballet at the Port Theatre

Taking action: We decided that we wanted to use multi age groups for fun activities to mix the students of all ages and from both programs. We theorized that by doing fun activities together the students might begin to make connections to other students and teachers. First we organized a multi-age activity day right before Halloween. Although the day was fun it didn't seem to create any new bonds. It was just very busy.

At our next few PLC sessions we spent lots of time discussing how to use multi age groups in a more meaningful way to build stronger connections and to hopefully create a "Sense of Wonder" in our students regarding our natural environment and our local First Nations understandings.

This evolved into our Explorer Groups. Now we have 14 Explorer Groups. Each group has one of seven Hul'qumi'num animal names and one of two colours. Each group has 22 or 23 students and one teacher. Staff have used PLC to create seven different Activities/Lessons. Once or twice a month the whole school participates in these Explorer Groups. Within the lesson planning of the Explorer Group lessons we have embedded the following First People's principles of learning:

- Strong emphasis on outdoor activities and nature-based lessons
- Lessons focus on talking through ideas over paper-based activities (similar to oral tradition)
- Lessons support the deeper understanding of our local, natural environment, our place within it and how our actions and choices affect our community.
- Use of Hul'qumi'num names and images for groups

Checking: -It should be noted that when we administered the Student Interviews and the Post Likert Scale Surveys, we had completed five of the seven Explorer Groups leaving two more to go. At the time of the interview we still had two more Explorer Group activities to do.

When we compare the results from the pre and post Likert Scale surveys we noticed:

- There is a slightly higher percentage of students who are liking coming to school, feeling safe outside at school, enjoying the forest and playground.
- A larger higher percentage of children are enjoying learning about Aboriginal culture, feel they know about Aboriginal culture, find it easier to explain how they are doing with

their learning, where they are going with their learning and what the next steps are in their learning.

- About the same percentage of students enjoy or really enjoy the pond while there is a greater percentage who think it is ok.
- The likeability of students in the English Program and French Program have altered a little.
- The totals for English students being perceived as friendly or very friendly in the fall was 65% and for the spring is 70%. The totals for French students being perceived as friendly or very friendly in the fall was 66% and for the spring is 64%. When you compare the surveys from students from each program we notice differences. In general, there is a greater percentage of English students who are finding the English students to be friendly or very friendly and a smaller percentage of English students finding the French students to be friendly or very friendly. For the French students there is a lower percentage of French students who perceive both French and English students to be very friendly yet a higher percentage of French students who perceive both French and English students to be friendly.

During the eight student interviews, seven students indicated that they felt like they knew more students at school now than before. However, they mostly said that they would “say hello to people” and not new friends.

The eight interviewees’ answers to the four questions were not very rich. Answers were mostly on the surface. (For example: “I’ve learned a lot... I can feel how I’m trying to listen really well to learn stuff”). We realized that we should be trying to embed these question into our everyday learning and teaching even more. We didn’t have pre-interviews to compare it to though.

The results for eco education and Aboriginal understandings went up. For connectedness between the two programs there was less improvement than we hoped.

Reflections/Advice:

- We learned that taking learning outside increases student buy-in and motivation.
- We are satisfied that in general our students are feeling connected to the nature in our school grounds.
- We realize that to build more connections between students in the English and French programs we will need to have more opportunities for them to do meaningful activities together. Five sessions of 45 minutes each didn’t provide this.

We are thinking that we might want to change our “Explorer Groups” based on feedback from the staff and students. Because we had run out of PLC dates this school year, most of the feedback from staff has been during Professional Book Club Meetings or informal conversations. Therefore, the following points are just examples of changes we may choose to implement. We will hold further discussions next year during PLC:

- allow students and teachers to choose a passion to build stations
- have longer sessions
- have the same station/group for at least 4 sessions
- have sessions more often (weekly? Twice a month?)

We are satisfied enough to change our main focus and Inquiry Project for next year. We have already drafted up a proposal. We hope to implement Ross Greene’s “Lost at School” Collaborative Positive Solutions to continue to build School Community by having Common Language and working together to solve problems.