



2015-2016 AESN TRANSITIONS CASE STUDY

School: Dover Bay Secondary

District: #68 Nanaimo Ladysmith

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Our focus for this year: To promote increasing Assessment for Learning, Aboriginal Understandings (First Peoples Principles of Learning), and our Community of Learners (self-regulation tool) to improve student ownership of learning

Scanning: Dover Bay began Dover Bay Learning (DBL) in 2014-2015. The intention of the program was to focus on a learning model that was inclusive of the 21st Century skills and competencies for all of our Grade 8 learners. During the program's inception, it became apparent that many students were coming into Dover Bay with limited social responsibility skills.

When students were asked the question, "what works for you as a learner?" many students couldn't answer. The "Community of Learners" values was designed and implemented in hopes that students coming from different elementary schools would understand and use values such as commitment, contribution, collaboration and communication to be successful learners. The values were established and students were expected to uphold and advocate for each other to act responsibly at school.

Assessment for learning using descriptive feedback to help students improve was showing positive growth and supported students to be able to answer the four questions with deep responsive justification of self-improvement. The evidence of students identifying tools and strategies that help improve learning was noted at the end of first term reports home to parents. All students were able to identify at least one adult in the building who the student felt believed them to be successful as a learner. Students commented that they were never asked by teachers in the past to write reasons why it mattered that they learned about the inquiry topic, and they appreciated being able to put their feelings of learning on a report home to parents. Some students commented, "I feel like a smart person because I can justify why it mattered that I learned about Aboriginal Understandings." (grade8 boy).

Focus: The Seven Principles of Learning became our guide and September was targeted to build our community of learners to promote values for acceptance and successful collaborative learning environments. We focused on tuning into emotions of our learners to grow a positive mind set for working and learning. We gave feedback to our learners regarding academic and behavioural goals to build community and feel a sense of belonging.

The academic work was engaging because students found the inquiry work researching worldview heroes who have made a difference demanding yet exciting. Students had choice in the hero they researched and they connected the attributes and values of the hero to the community of learners values and found a connection between themselves and the heroes they

researched and how challenging it is to stand up for values that make a difference such as our 4C's. This was the hook that students realized was key to making a positive difference in their lives and a reason to advocate for following the 4C's at school and in the community.

The inquiry promoted a sense of connectedness among the students and the rest of the year has resulted in buy in from students regarding the personal responsibility that learning requires to be successful. The minimal push back of self-regulated behavior was acknowledged by individual students in the year end teacher students' oral presentation of learning that required answers to the four questions.

Hunch: The First Peoples Principles of Learning were easily identified in our teacher scanning stage because we all recognized the importance of learning as a social endeavor and student behavior is critical to positive learning environments. It cannot be assumed that students understand how to behave in a new classroom setting such as high school presents. Our school has six partner schools and the fact is that most of the classes have a composition of students who don't know each other and need time to bond and build trust. As teachers, we realized that we needed to spend a significant amount of time at the beginning of the year to set the values for learning so that our model of inclusive, collaborative group and independent working model will be successful

New professional learning: We used the redesign curriculum interdisciplinary teaching opportunity to create inquiry topics to connect subjects and student learning. We wanted to eliminate the sense of separate subjects so that our students can learn holistically. We were using the "backward design model".

Teachers decided upon a topic of inquiry such as Aboriginal Understandings and Global Citizen to integrate the core subjects. The Humanities teachers experimented with the Spiral of Inquiry framework as the structure for student research and presentation of learning. Math and Science teachers created units of study that had some integration into the topic, but the teachers did not feel that they had enough understanding to go deep with student learning.

Taking action: Next year the Math and Science teachers are going to work under the STEM approach (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) as they feel this is more of an integrated model for teaching. We are also going to use Classroom Google to post our assignments so students can see the connection between the content areas of Humanities and STEM. We will also be using Introduction to the *Understanding By Design* framework.

Assessment for Learning remains a focus in our scanning phase. We started the year off with a rich professional development day facilitated by Linda Kaser and Judy Halbert with a focus on following the Spiral of Inquiry, and we attached Assessment For Learning as a common theme to be investigated this year.

Checking: Teachers appreciated that Linda and Judy supported the idea to stay on the scanning phase until they had enough data to move toward a focus. Some teachers are beginning to include asking the three questions for students to answer in a self-reflection and checking on their learning at the end of inquiry studies.

Sharing student reflections with colleagues has been a great discovery because we are going to have the three questions as part of our student reporting to teachers and parents next year. In

addition, a discussion of “assessment week” in January and June of next year, has started and teachers are feeling comfortable with having students share highlights of inquiry learning including reflections on the three questions: What's working for their learning? What tools and strategies help improve learning? and Why it mattered that they learned the topic and a statement of the message of learning they want others to understand.

There are challenges because behavior among some students is a focus that needs more intervention and time to change. Building community is hard and even harder is the time it takes to support students who are lacking the skills to be committed learners in an inclusive classroom. Time is the important ingredient to the success of building community values.

By the end of first term teachers and counselors noticed positive results of classroom behavior and lower reports from students regarding anxiety towards classroom learning. Student well-being and behaviour improved due to the constant reinforcement and practice of the Community of Learners (COL) collective work within each particular classroom community.

Finally, we had two teachers redesign our report card with formative assessment in the words of Mastery, Capable, Developing and Requires Assistance. The report has four graphs; Humanities, Math, Science and the COL, all on one page. Teachers input data and the bar graph indicates one of the four levels of progress. The discoveries we are uncovering are that we need to have common language of learning descriptors under each subject. This is a work in progress. Overall, parents have more formative feedback on student learning than in the past and this is a positive.

Reflections/Advice: Our inquiry was expansive, deeply engaging and required dedicated, growth minded colleagues ready and willing to meet regularly to plan and debrief. We are committed to using assessment for learning feedback and opportunity for learners to revise and resubmit work to show growth in learning. We are using formative assessment in a summative manner with our redesign report card using the Community of Learners self-assessment report to parents and answering the three questions too. In addition, our academic progress is shown on graphs in Humanities, Math and Science. Next year our Math and Science will be called STEM and will report on the graph using big idea learning outcomes rather than reporting on specific units of study. This is new learning that our STEM teachers are working on for next year to align with a balanced literacy approach. PE has changed to Healthy Learning and will be added to the graph next year along with French.

Our structure for DBL8 has a reduced number of teachers. We have three pods with three subjects for interdisciplinary teaching and learning. Each pod has a Humanities, STEM and Healthy Learning/French teachers. This reduction in collaborative teaching teams will support easier communication and teaching grade 8 not a mixture of grades and assignments.

We feel most proud of our start and finish of the year with a focus on what was and what is our community of learners values at Dover Bay. Why? Well simply because we started to build a community and we ended the year as a community.

The April self-assessment was used to acknowledge the students in Grade 8 and 9 who reached “Mastery” in all 4C’s to be invited to the awards ceremony to receive the Community of Learners Leader award. This award replaced the academic subject award that was given in the past to the top one or two students in the core subject areas.

We had over 100 students receive the award and the students reading their own expressions of why the community of learners was valuable to them this year impressed parents. The ceremony was so emotionally fulfilling that we organized a grade8 gathering and each class reported out on the class created expression of “why the community of learners was valuable this year and what will they continue with next year.”

The gathering had such a positive energy flow and all the students now know that the Community of Learners Leader award will be handed out again next year and hopefully many more students will work towards this goal. Bringing students and teachers together at the end of the year is a new experience at Dover Bay. Yes, we are changing the culture of our school from predominantly academic to a community of learners who are collaboratively learning and enjoying their learning journey with purpose and pride.

Teachers have debriefed and collectively realize the power of building community and the self-assessment-reporting tool along with student presentations of learning. We learn so much from each student sharing their year-long learning journey and they can share the tools and strategies that they will take to their next grade to be successful learners. This is an emotional uplift for teachers and gives a sense of closure to a school year that feels inclusive and respectful.