



## Networks of Inquiry and Innovation Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network

### 2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

**School Name:** École Central Elementary School of the Arts

**School District:** SD#60 Peace River North

**Inquiry Team Members:** Ashley Beerling, Jaimelia Turner

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**Type of inquiry:** NOII

**Grade levels:** Primary (K - 3), Secondary (8 - 12)

**Curricular area(s):** Language Arts - Oral Language, Physical & Health Education

**Focus area(s):** Core competencies (for example, critical thinking, communication, problem solving), First Peoples Principles of Learning, Social and emotional learning

#### **In one sentence, what was your focus for the year?**

We wanted to see what benefits would come from joining K/1 and grade 10 buddies for 90 minutes at various locations to run, dance, play, read, eat and develop social and emotional skills.

**Scanning:** Briefly summarize your scanning process. How did you use the four key questions as part of the scanning process? What did you notice about the experiences of your learners that were most important to your team?

Many of the K/1 students in my classes struggle with self-regulation and a feeling of safety and belonging in the school setting. As we build relationships with them, they are more excited to engage and try new things. This is also true of the Grade 10 students. We also learned that many of the experiences they remember positively about school happen outside of the school buildings and outside the structure of a classroom setting. Both groups love physical activity, play, friendship and eating. Both groups want more activities where they can connect with others in a meaningful and fun way.

**Focus:** In a few sentences, explain why you selected this area. What changes were you hoping to obtain for your learners?



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We wanted to build relationship outside of our school building and our normal school connections in order to foster a sense of belonging and confidence as learners and leaders. We want to give the younger students a chance to communicate and practice reading, writing and sharing ideas about their identity in an authentic manner. For the older students, we want them to engage in a nurturing way with their little buddies and model their own self-awareness and identity research. We want to see how rewarding these relationships can be for both groups.

**Hunch:** Describe your hunches about the ways in which practices at the school may have been contributing to the experiences of your learners that were of concern to you.

The physical environment of a school can be constraining with many rules about where to go and when. As school often requires a 22-1 child-adult ratio for the younger students, this creates a deficit of caring adults to nurture the children, listen to their stories and guide them. The school routines and expectations can be very different than the home life of students, contributing to a disconnect between home self and school self. Relationships between students of vast ages are not often feasible with separate buildings situated far apart. With high demands on older students' time, there is not an opportunity for generational leadership.

In order to maximize the social nature of learning and to build horizontal and vertical connections, we need first to build and practice relationships. This is not always authentic in a classroom. And the children learn to care for others when their own emotional needs are met.

**New professional learning:** What new areas of professional learning did you explore? What resources were most helpful? What specific designs did you use to support the learning of your colleagues?

We started with an Aboriginal focus and tried to integrate Aboriginal content into the visits. This was not successful as it felt contrived. We read and discussed Aboriginal Worldviews and Perspectives in the Classroom and In Our Own Words - Bringing Authentic First People's Content to the K-3 classroom. What we learned that following the First People's Principles of Learning of intergenerational roles and relationships and exploring identity were the core purpose of the visits.

As we recognized this, we switched our research to Stuart Shanker's model of self-reg and explored the 5 domains of biological, emotional, cognitive, social and pro-social regulation. This gave us a lens through which to observe why the buddy visits were so important to the students and how the benefits carried into their overall learning.



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**Taking action:** Describe strategies you and your team decided on and how your actions worked out.

1. We wrote simple biographies for the K/1 students. The grade 10s picked a buddy based on a photo and the bio. Then the grade 10s wrote back with photo and a bio for their little buddies. This helped smooth over the initial meeting.
2. We warned the big buddies that the littles would be dis-regulated on the first meetings and might react unexpectedly. We asked them to be patient and shower attention on the littles. This took 3 and 4 visits to smooth out for the more guarded littles.
3. By looking at the photographs from each visit and our buddy's selfies periodically between visits, we were able to reflect on our experiences and our budding friendship. This allowed the relationship to deepen asynchronously.
4. Each visit started with 20 minutes of walking and running around the community walking track. This allowed side by side conversation and smoothed out the initial jitters.
5. We always ate together. We did one bannock day and one potluck lunch. These were very successful.
6. Each visit we read books. This was tricky at first as we didn't give the gr. 10s any instruction on supporting emerging readers. It got easier as the K/1s had more control over reading and they took charge of the reading.
7. We did two big dances. One was a dance party with modern music and one was a folk dance after K/1 practicing. Both were super successful after practicing dance etiquette with the littles.
8. We did visits at the high school where the track was located. This was possible because our littles could walk there and back. The admin at the high school was very supportive.
9. The big buddies came to the elementary school twice, once for a dance and once for our festival of colours. These events were toward the end of the year and allowed the littles to take the lead to welcome their friends.

**Checking:** Summarize the differences you made. Were they enough? Were you satisfied?

We did not gather four question evidence early in the year. It felt like we were scanning all year. At the end of the year, we asked the four questions and it triggered a few older kids by asking too personal of questions out of context. We didn't tailor the questions to our project specifically. When asked the four questions in context of their presentation of learning, all the big buddies were able to discuss their own experiences. We will explain the whole scope of the project to the big buddies early in the year and gather data early.



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**Reflections/Advice:** Finish by sharing what you learned from this inquiry, where you plan to go next, and what advice you would offer other schools with a similar interest.

We found that the relationship itself was the greatest value to the students. The grade 10s felt privileged to be part of the program and took excellent care when working with their little buddy. All of them mentioned this partnership as a pivotal influence on their development during their final presentation of learning, offering them a leadership opportunity. They noticed how much care and attention is required to care and nurture a young child. The little ones developed courage to meet and work with new people in new environments. They gained confidence to take on their own leadership and care taking roles in the school. We are certain this was learned by the modelling they received from their big buddies.