



Networks of Inquiry and Innovation Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network

2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

School Name: Bear Creek Elementary

School District: SD#36 Surrey

Inquiry Team Members: Joanne Fischer, Marissa Olson, Lainie Leon, Brett Cameron, Dana VanDiermen

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Type of inquiry: AESN

Grade levels: Primary (K - 3), Intermediate (4 - 7)

Curricular area(s): Not applicable

Focus area(s): Community-based learning, Community Connections

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

Our focus for this year is to connect with our Aboriginal students and families informally, personally, and without authority or judgment.

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?

During our scanning process, we saw our learners as being resilient and holding much potential. We believed that they could find people in our school that care and believe in them. In our classrooms, teachers often ask students to connect their learning with their families. We noticed our learners are hesitant to invite their parents into the school. We also noticed many parents do not share in conversations with our staff regularly. As we know learning is social, we want our students to share their learning with their families. We also recognize the history of education and the institutional school setting that has had a negative impact on some of our Aboriginal families. As such, we negotiate a complex relationship between school and home.

Focus: In a few sentences, explain why you selected this area. What changes were you



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hoping to obtain for your learners?

As we focused our discussion and exploration, we realized that we have many powerful members of our larger community that we do not regularly connect with in our school. We feel that if we make more meaningful connections with our families, that our school could become a place for the community, not just a place of learning. We want to create a space for our families to foster a partnership between home and school. With an invigorated partnership, we hope to share our strengths and improve deficits.

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.

Our initial hunch is that our staff make quick assumptions about our community. We feel that these assumptions about our community have an effect on how we (staff) interact with our larger community. Although we work hard to support our students, we feel that we could make stronger connections with our families. We need to change how we see our community, repair broken connections, and create new partnerships. We want to build cohesive connections between home and school.

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?

Most of our learning occurred when working alongside our staff, colleagues and families. As a staff, we shared our knowledge about our students and their families. We gathered and discussed the needs of our students regularly. We are learning through our integration of the First People's Principles of Learning into our practices and exploring how the principles shape our interactions and teaching. We also look to our neighbours at Frank Hurt to learn from their connections to families and community. We notice that our students and families respect the Frank Hurt interactions and feel connected to their learning community. We are trying to follow their lead and make similar connections at Bear Creek. We are also using "parking lot conversations" to learn about our families. We hope that the learning that occurs informally around our school can guide us to create events and opportunities to connect with other families. We also learn from district events, like Bannock and Books, as ways to meet our families and learn from them. For example, we learned about opening some of our events with a prayer and have made a strong connection with a family to help shape future events. We use this inquiry as an opportunity to learn in a variety of non-traditional ways. We have enjoyed the social nature of learning



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

Our inquiry group took action by planning activities and events at school for our students, their families, and our staff to enjoy together. We have organized events that focused on building friendships and personal connections between school and home. Our goal was to organize four events for staff and families to meet.

Our first event was an autumn open house. We invited families to join our staff for an afternoon of games, activities, and food in an informal, non-academic setting. Teachers and staff planned various activities such as disco bowling and beanbag toss, Lego tower building, and crafts. Each wing of our school hosted an activity. Our music teacher created an ongoing drumming presentation in the gym, while families gathered to chat and create communal colouring. Another set of staff and teachers grilled a variety of hot dogs and met with families over food. Teachers and staff were encouraged to start personal conversation with our families. Families and staff met as friends and community members, not as people that mark tests or assign homework.

Our second event was our annual Bannock and Books gathering. Alongside district staff, our inquiry group tweaked the traditional Bannock and Books plan. We shifted our event to a larger space to connect more families with our school. Although this was a separate entity to our inquiry events, we learned a lot about our community. We learned of important prayers, roles our families have in the community, local customs, and other members of the community that we can connect with. This event was another opportunity to meet with our community and make personal connections.

We have two more events planned for the spring. Another open house is planned for April. We will mimic our autumn event by gathering around food, barbecued salmon and baked items, and fun. Our teachers are planning activities and games that focus on the First People's Principles of Learning and building personal and cultural identity. An art showcase in the gym will feature a gallery walk through of Aboriginal and Canadian art and culture. We will also host another Bannock and Books event in May. This is our opportunity to adapt a successful program to meet the needs and requests of our community directly. We have learned that our community likes to gather and meet outdoors, so this event will be held around our school grounds. We will adapt the activities to meet the wishes of our students and families to engage them in different experiences at Bear Creek. We also want to use this event as an opportunity to share different cultures with our larger community.



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Various community members will be invited to help plan and contribute to our event to promote a greater connection between home and school. Our inquiry group is working to make these events sustainable so we can grow these experiences in following years.

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

As our inquiry project is ongoing, our checking is also ongoing. Our plan is challenging to check at this time. Our focus is to create ongoing, sustainable events that will slowly build stronger, personal connections between home and school. We will find success if we continue to demonstrate that we are by providing these opportunities to our families. When measuring our success, we use attendance at our events (Autumn Open House – 110/Bannock and Books – 30) as a baseline. We also use the number of informal conversations with our families and the quality of those conversations. In general, we look to see if our staff and families are more congenial or make more friendly, less official, connections during their interactions at the classroom door or on the school grounds. We see some differences already beginning at our school. First, we see that informal, non-academic events do bring families into the school to gather with our teachers and staff. We also see an improvement in attendance at our events over similar school functions held last year. Finally, we see that parents are engaging with their children's learning and classrooms more. Parents are more open to have friendly conversations with teachers and staff at school since these events opened those doors. As our project grows, we will introduce more formal checks of surveys and check-ins with our families. We are confident we are making steps in the right direction because we see happy families at our school events, our students are excited to bring their families to Bear Creek, and the doors are opening around our school for families to connect with their classrooms and children's learning in new and informal ways.

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.

When we reflect on our inquiry, we see that making progress is slow but we are happy to try new ways to connect with our families. We also see that our staff is excited to participate and welcomes these opportunities to connect with their students' families. We also see value in providing low risk, high reward opportunities for our families to come to school. All we ask of our students and families is to come to school, have a small bite to eat, and say hello. By offering opportunities to come to school with less formal expectations, we see our families arrive at our school with smiles and an openness to greet others. Overall, we find this project invigorating and exciting as educators because it is beginning to



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provide a better understanding of who our learners are and where they come from.