



Networks of Inquiry and Innovation Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network

2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

School Name: Cedar Elementary School

School District: SD#68 Nanaimo-Ladysmith

Inquiry Team Members: Shona Sneddon Principal

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Type of inquiry: NOII

Grade levels: Primary (K - 3)

Curricular area(s): Language Arts - Reading, Language Arts - Writing

Focus area(s): Differentiated instruction

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

Our focus was to increase student engagement and achievement in prioritized early reading skills through playful differentiated learning and targeted intervention experiences.

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?

We used our common formative assessment data that resulted from our District's reading assessment screener. We considered this academic information in conjunction with what we observed and felt during teaching and learning experiences in the classroom (student engagement, SEL, self-regulation, reaching teaching points). While at different places individually, as a school team we are boarding the canoe and raising our paddle with reference to these two sets of principles. We are beginning to make connections between theory and classroom and beginning to reflect on our practice towards proactive planning. Many of our collaborative discussions this year revolve around how learning takes patience



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and time with regard to the developmental factors of reading readiness and considering each student's pace of learning and stage of readiness and how we can support them in their progress. We also often reflect together on what we see as early steps towards learning requires exploration of one's identity as we encourage our learners to begin to see themselves as readers and writers and problem solvers, and how our actions support this growth and exploration.

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

We realized the need to differentiate instruction to meet the range of academic and SEL/self-regulation needs and strengths of our learners. In discussion with each other and with reference to research, we decided to focus our learning of Joyful Literacy processes on one-two prioritized early literacy skills per grade, and our hope is that the combination of just-right skills in small groups based on formative assessment data and playful activity will mean growth in our students' engagement and literacy skills.

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.

At the beginning of the year, we were a newly amalgamated staff still settling into new physical spaces. It is our feeling is that our ability to teach in the ways we know are best practices was/is hindered by a lack of current and engaging resources for our learners and that all of our primary teachers have access to. We are trying to use what we have in the most optimal way while recognizing that we are not reaching everyone with our strategies, and we realize that our approaches vary across our divisions. The self-regulation challenges in many of our classrooms creates a dilemma in which we realize that traditional whole group instruction does not meet their academic or physical needs, but structures for successful small group instruction is also challenging to achieve.

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?

Much of our new learning has centered around the tracking and organization of assessment data using Dr. Mort's Circle Charts. We have been developing and sharing ways to use these documents in the classroom to capture progress, make flexible groupings,



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match learners with activities, as well as to easily communicate next steps for learning with staff that push in to support students.

We have been reflecting on how our team would like to approach interventions, as we discussed Dr. Mort's Putting On the Blitz at the same time as Joyful Literacy. We have identified that targeted intervention materials accessible to all early primary teachers is important to our team, paired with ensuring we each have instructional resources available in our classrooms. We are discussing how best to access and organize our human resources as well to support our focus. Over the year, we have recognized a tendency to want to look at interventions first to support the immediate needs of our current students, and we have often reminded ourselves of the need to slow down to spend time on what is working/what's next regarding good first teaching (Tier 1) of these concepts in the classroom.

A smaller team within our team has also spent time discussing and investigating the role of play in learning, including different kinds of play, what current research says about play with regard to SEL, self-regulation and academic learning, and the types play most valuable in supporting our goals and student growth in literacy. We have been looking for and testing ways to increase playful learning opportunities and student choice within structures in our literacy times.

We have found this process to be of significant benefit to our own identity as a teaching team, from our beginning as a new team in a newly amalgamated school. It has required us to discuss our priorities in literacy teaching and learning, as well as our materials and approaches. We feel much more cohesive and 'on the same page' with respect to where we are going and are keen to build on this foundation next year.

The key resources we found helpful have been Joyful Literacy (Mort), Putting on the Blitz (Mort), Literacy Work Stations (Diller), Jolly Phonics program, NAEYC (articles and position statements).

We have used our PLC time for much of our work on our inquiry this year. We have made use of our school based professional learning inquiry and innovation lead teacher to support our learning to gather and share resources and work in classrooms collaboratively with us.

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



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In our classrooms we have been using literacy stations/alphabet stations and “Daily 5” structures. This work will be ongoing to continue to develop and refine playful learning experiences that made a difference.

We have focused on curricular and core competencies, growth mindset and increasing opportunities for regular student reflection on goals and next steps in relation to criteria and expectations, to help our learners be aware of their purpose and the link between their actions and their learning (through the use of anchor charts, Successful Learner Traits and student self-assessment) and have found our language being echoed and internalized by our learners in their words and actions.

We have implemented use of the circle charts for tracking and communication – allowing targeted support to occur and make the most use of time and instruction.

We are reflecting our classrooms, materials, resource and organization using Dr. Mort’s Ideal Classroom Checklist from Joyful Literacy, especially as it relates to our literacy goal and the playful/joyful criterion. This is ongoing work.

We have focused on planning where to add playful materials to our literacy time, and which materials will support our goals. We have set our direction for next year to look at materials and structures to support targeted interventions with ease of access and ability to be shared among our team as needs require.

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

We are pleased with the difference that our focus on using the circle charts has made – we have an increased awareness of exactly where our students are and can more easily target a skill or concept or make a flexible group to address a gap. This has helped our professional discussions as well as we are able to be specific. We will continue on with use of this tool next year.

We are pleased that our learners have made gains in their knowledge of our prioritized skills for each grade. We used our common formative assessment literacy screener and related classroom assessments as our baseline and see strong gains in individual learners as well as in specific skills across the class, as measured by repeated screener assessment



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and circle chart data. We are in early stages of addressing improvements in Tier 1 practice and planning interventions and will continue this focus into next year.

We are pleased to notice that our learners are more aware of their purpose and why it matters, and are beginning to be able to identify their strengths and next steps:

"I am learning to sound out words – it helps you read. If it doesn't sound right, try and flip it over" (describing long/short vowel sounds). (From the 4 Key Questions interview, Gr 1)

"I have a goal! I'm really proud of my sentence!" (Spontaneously, following a teacher-student writing conference, Kindergarten)

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 have learned

- Working as a collaborative team raises expectations and provides a supportive environment for ourselves and our students
- Data collection and sharing sets direction for teaching and supports team communication to support learner needs
- Playful learning is essential in early primary
- Differentiation of learning experiences and materials supports students who need more time and exposure to master skills and allows all to make progress