



Networks of Inquiry and Innovation Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network

2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

School Name: Crofton Elementary School

School District: SD#79 Cowichan Valley

Inquiry Team Members: Phaedra Fairwell, Brenda Lee, Katrina Horsfall, Jen Calverley

Inquiry Team Contact Email: Jen Calverley

Type of inquiry: NOII

Grade levels: Primary (K - 3)

Curricular area(s): Language Arts - Oral Language

Focus area(s): Core competencies (for example, critical thinking, communication, problem solving), Differentiated instruction, Experiential learning, First Peoples Principles of Learning, Flexible learning, Land, Nature or Place-based learning, Universal design for learning

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

The focus of the project was to increase students' narrative language abilities by using play-based outdoor experiences and explicit instruction of storytelling 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?

The Kindergarten Universal Language Screen, administered by our school district Speech and Language Pathologists, demonstrated vulnerability in our kindergarten students' narrative language abilities (sequencing, using descriptive language, and problem solving). These findings led to questions around how improvements could be fostered in these areas (eg. How would we create learning experiences for our students that provided authentic opportunities for exploring storytelling? How could we ensure students are active participants in the learning process and aware of the learning intention/goal? How could we involve other educators, parents, and community members in the learning process to broaden our expertise and connect our students' learning on a deeper level? Where do children naturally show their storytelling skills? How do we make this learning experiences



Networks of Inquiry and Innovation Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network

2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

happen within the school constructs? How do we build upon these experiences with intention?). These questions created a healthy dialogue between the classroom teachers, district support staff, and administration, and a desire to examine narrative language abilities in a manner that responded to the outcomes of each question presented and explored.

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

The outcome of the discussions surrounding the questions listed above led to the concept of 'nature narratives,' and the question that creating authentic learning experiences for children in various outdoor settings in the local community would help children to become more skilled at narrating stories and using language in social situations. It was noted that children enjoyed telling stories in play-based experiences that are authentic and engaging, which happened most often when children were playing outdoors within and amongst their natural environment where their imaginations were allowed to freely explore. The focus then shifted to reinforcing and extending classroom storytelling workshops and explicit teaching with opportunities for students to step outside of the school and into the community to explore these concepts in a play-based manner.

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.

In the past, children's narrative language abilities had not been identified as an area requiring further development and the focus of the classroom teacher had not always been on the explicit instruction of sequencing, problem solving and descriptive language. Classroom teachers had always embedded literacy and learning about the parts of a story into their lessons, however, students' personal narrative abilities to demonstrate this skill may not have been thoroughly focused on. Having students explain, share, and retell their stories in detail and sequence would be a new learning goal. Similarly, the classes often went outdoors to participate in activities and lessons, however, the concept of focusing on narrative language development through natural outdoor learning experiences had not explicitly been taught or explored.

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?



Networks of Inquiry and Innovation Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network

2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

Throughout the inquiry, the teaching staff explored strategies for developing narrative language skills in play-based outdoor settings and participated in reflective practices, which focused on the effects of the outdoor learning experiences and how to sustain and extend these practices. Connections were also drawn to storytelling and writers' workshops the staff had attended, and to outdoor learning information shared by Faye Brownlie. The team also explored creative strategies for implementing the continuum of support through reorganizing methods of access and developed a deeper understanding of the core competencies, specifically creative thinking and communication.

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

The strategies that contributed to the success of the project included explicit teaching of the storytelling structure, scaffolding learning, modelling and practice, involving numerous adults in the process of learning, and taking learning outdoors. Frequently, the students were brought together in a large group to learn about the structure of a story. The story structure, "Somebody..., wanted..., but..., so..., then...." was used to help students build thoughtful and developed stories. The "SWBST" structure was taught systematically, teaching each piece of a story independently of the other, while modeling, practicing and involving the active participation of the students. After the students had learned and observed the story structure modeled in class, they were taken outside to practice and apply the structure. Once outdoors in the local forest or neighbourhood, the students were provided with endless opportunities to create and imagine a story using the resources and items found in the surroundings. For example, a pinecone could become a child's 'somebody' who 'wanted' to find his missing friend the leaf, 'but'...) The students created their stories, and then shared them with at least two adults. Parents, staff members, local elders and storytellers, and community partners also joined in on the activities.

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

Towards the end of the school year, the Kindergarten Universal Language Screen was re-administered by our school district Speech and Language Pathologists. The results showed that 100% of the Kindergarten and Grade 1 students who participated in the program were no longer at risk, and all were 'fully meeting' or 'exceeding' expectations in Oral Language. Along with the qualitative results, students also showed increased engagement and enthusiasm for learning when exploring outdoors and applying their learning in settings that encourage imagination and creative thinking. Similarly, the



Networks of Inquiry and Innovation Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network

2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

students became more competent at communicating their ideas and sharing their stories using the story structure.

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.

The act of going outside to participate in learning activities created endless opportunities for experiential learning and encouraged the active participation of the learner. Because the task was purposeful, and the students were able to think creatively and personalize the storytelling task, every child was fully engaged. The students were always eager to get outside and to find the elements of their stories in the natural surroundings. The stories evolved and became more embellished and developed with each retelling. Having different audiences (adults) to share with also increased their excitement and contributed to improved narrative language and communication skills.

Given more time, an extension of this project would be to extend the storytelling process into writing activities, for both pleasure and to share learning. Continuing to promote parent involvement and to share with them the story structure “SWBST” for home practice would also benefit the project and students’ development of narrative language.