



Networks of Inquiry and Innovation Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network

2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

School Name: Dover Bay Secondary

School District: SD#68 Nanaimo-Ladysmith

Inquiry Team Members: Ray Andrews, Clarice Tyce, Tony Dendes, Michelle James, Tanya Lebens, Danielle Nicols, Hannah Bolton, Carson Williams, Lynn Brown, Burton Wei

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Type of inquiry: AESN Transitions

Grade levels: Secondary (8 - 12)

Curricular area(s): Language Arts - Literacy, Language Arts - Oral Language, Language Arts - Reading, Language Arts - Writing, Mathematics / Numeracy, Physical & Health Education, Science, Social Studies

Focus area(s): Aboriginal understandings (for example, Traditional Knowledge, oral history, reconciliation), Core competencies (for example, critical thinking, communication, problem solving), Differentiated instruction, First Peoples Principles of Learning, Flexible learning, Formative assessment, Growth mindset, Inclusion and inclusive instructional strategies, Inquiry-based learning, Land, Nature or Place-based learning, STEM / STEAM, Universal design for learning

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

Connecting learning using an Interdisciplinary Aboriginal Understandings inquiry "How does where one live affect how one lives?"

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 realized that to build a cross curricular inquiry project, we needed a focused Grade 8



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team that was small in number. Administration gave us that framework through a linear program with students podded into groups of 90, taught by three to four teachers. They allowed us to take Math and Science and turn it into STEM, making it congruent with the Humanities structure already in place. In addition, French was linked with Healthy Living so students schedules could have one week of French and one week of PE. The students' electives landed in one block, giving all the Grade 8 academic teachers a common preparation time for two out of four terms.

We reflected on last year's success with Aboriginal Understandings and committed to utilize our common prep time to collaborate on an interdisciplinary inquiry. The First People's Principles of Learning and Aboriginal Understandings provided an entry point for connecting interdisciplinary competencies. We also acknowledged this area as a key point for our own professional learning. Part of making this work was scanning the learning intentions of all disciplines and recognizing the role of indigenous knowledge in those learning outcomes.

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

We selected this area of study for numerous reasons. We decided on a study of Aboriginal understandings as this was an area that could easily cross many curricular areas. We could incorporate Humanities, French, STEM and Healthy Living as subsections of Aboriginal Understandings. Furthermore, First Peoples Principles of Learning could be embedded throughout this topic. We felt that the use of a common inquiry question to guide the learning, as well as common assessment criteria, would provide continuity and true cross-curricular learning for our students.

Aboriginal Understandings were also selected as many teachers felt that this was an area in which they were not strong in their own personal knowledge. Many teachers admitted that teaching Aboriginal Understandings was out of their comfort zone. To co-create a cross curricular unit that incorporated Aboriginal Understandings among a group of teachers was an exciting learning experience for everyone.



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The hope for our students was that they would gain knowledge about Aboriginal Peoples, learn that education is holistic, rather than compartmentalized into subjects, and to encourage the core competencies of critical thinking, creativity and personal responsibility. Furthermore, students would use the four questions to reflect upon their learning experience, both for personal insight and as information for parents.

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.

We speculated that a cross-curricular assignment would enhance their understanding that learning does not happen in isolated subject areas but that all content has connections. We hypothesized that students' strengths in one discipline would support their work in other subject areas. In addition, the inquiry question encompassed concepts from all curricular areas. In this way, the students could take a more holistic approach to their learning, drawing on all their knowledge to address the challenge presented. Likewise the creation of a Mind Map supports knowledge development and analysis for all the students' areas of study.

While the Mind Map assignment was to be independently created, we believed and encouraged students to work together during the research phase. We also anticipated that peer and self assessment techniques would also support collaborative work. Finally we had previous mind map assignments that would help students build and understanding of the project and quality work.

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?

Subject areas needed to take the time to tailor the newly designed curriculum to explore Aboriginal Understandings in a way that was authentic and meaningful, but also student centered. This required collaboration within each discipline, as well compromise when all subject areas came together to plan so that we were able to create one common product



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for all disciplines. Teachers attempted to use AFL practices to enhance student's understanding of the content and how to demonstrate their knowledge through their mind map.

Some members of the team required support to properly facilitate using the Spiral of Inquiry to guide students through this process, and heavily relied on the Spiral of Inquiry Playbook (Halbert and Kaser, 2017) as well as the expertise of other members of the team. This helped us to guide students to connect concepts as they explored themes through the creation of the final product - a mind map.

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

We came together as a team and developed a central question for our cross curricular inquiry. The question we settled on was "How does where one live, affect how one lives?" Once the central question was established we broke out into content area groups and decided how we were going to deliver the material. Over the following weeks the content was delivered in each subject area; all the while our central question guided our practice to ensure that our learners were processing with the central question in mind.

After we delivered the necessary content we launched the "cross curricular mind map" project. Each subject area teacher provided class time and instruction in their area on how to build their portion of the mind (moving general to specific, differentiation/ division of content, use of images, aesthetics). By the end of the project students were working diligently in each of their classes to finish the mind map.

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

- Connections between different subject areas were made by students.
- Learning continued even if the space changed, and students found this to be a very positive part of the project.
- It was good to stick with one question - everyone was able to tie into it, and it was less



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confusing for students.

- This project developed different types of learning. It catered to visual, auditory and hands-on learning.
- Most students embraced learning, made connections to and valued understandings of FPPL.
- Some students made connections to personal ancestry.

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 learned that students were able to make strong connections between the subject areas and work towards answering a common question throughout each discipline area. Students were able to use their strengths in one subject area to advance their understanding in a course they might typically have difficulty in. We also learned that there is value in doing collaborative marking to gain a more holistic understanding of each student. The joint marking process reinforced the need to enhance our assessment rubric to tie it more closely to the learning standards for our project. We plan to revise the rubric for next year so students can effectively own the act of creating quality work, assessing themselves and their peers more adeptly. We also heard from students that the project was “too long” because Spring Break landed in the middle of our work, making it seem longer than it was. We see value in moving the project to an earlier start date, allowing us to address growth mindset, research, cross-curricular ideas and FPPL concepts from the beginning of the year. It gives us an opportunity to bring place-based learning into the project as well.

As professionals we wanted to ensure that we were approaching Aboriginal Understandings in a culturally appropriate way. We look forward to developing our understanding of how we are using First Peoples Principles of Learning in planning for next year through consultation with Indigenous members of our community.

We feel more confident because the details of the assignment and the assessment criteria have been developed, and we plan to assign this project again for our new students.