



Networks of Inquiry and Innovation Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network

2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

School Name: Fort St. James Secondary

School District: SD#91 Nechako Lakes

Inquiry Team Members: Lenore Aspell, Kelley Inden, Gretchen Vogelsang, Margaret Mattess, Debbie Koehn, Michelle Miller-Gauthier

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Type of inquiry: AESN

Grade levels: Secondary (8 - 12)

Curricular area(s): Language Arts - Literacy, Language Arts - Oral Language, Language Arts - Reading, Language Arts - Writing, Social Studies

Focus area(s): Aboriginal understandings (for example, Traditional Knowledge, oral history, reconciliation), Community-based learning, Core competencies (for example, critical thinking, communication, problem solving), Differentiated instruction, Experiential learning, First Peoples Principles of Learning

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

Increase student engagement and connectedness by developing critical thinking skills and engaging in provocative and experiential learning about Indigenous history and colonization.

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?

Our learners tend to be reluctant and struggling readers, which requires us to be creative about ways to approach reading effectively. There was a lack of inter-connectedness between groups of students (a segregation between the three reserves and between the non-Aboriginal students). Students are at the beginning of learning how to be part of an effective, safe, kind, community of learners. Social media has also become a challenging roadblock to learning because it enters the classroom and causes distraction and distress, sometimes creating and continuing the trauma in learners lives.



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

Our community can be very polarized and there is often a lack of understanding of each other and in themselves about our current reality. Poverty, addiction, violence and racism are all very visible aspects of our community. A small number of people have prospered in the resource industry, but that is changing. We believed that learning about our country's history from the perspectives of Indigenous people would help create greater understanding of our community and our country today. Our guiding question was "What does it mean to be a Canadian in 2017".

Our goals are longer term. We want more Aboriginal students to graduate from FSJSS. We want students to develop increased independence and self directed learning 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.

- Trying to learn in traditional ways was proving ineffective for many learners.
- Many learners have experienced education as a process of filling in the blanks on a piece of paper instead of learning to be educated citizens in a democratic society.

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?

- Read and explored new resources like those carried by Strong Nations Publishing.
- Participated in an inquiry learning session in August 2016 (SD 91).
- Collaborated to co-plan and design learning opportunities using the new resources and revised curriculum as a team
- We explored co-teaching with district support teachers

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

- Teachers opened up to be vulnerable with students, modelling that they were learning alongside and taking risks. We infused growth mindset 'ways of being' in our daily work with learners, failing and trying again, being relentless and persistent.



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- We invited community members (elders, residential school survivors or their relatives) to the classrooms for experiential lessons like The Blanket Exercise (Kairos). This proved one of the most powerful strategies partly because the community members were deeply moved that we were willing to help students learn about the history from an Indigenous perspective.
- There was differentiation (small groups, one to one support and student choice) helped learners go deep with inquiries that were meaningful to them.
- Student-led inquiry supported students to connect to issues that spoke to their hearts and they became invested in their learning.
- All students were asked to reflect on what was important about what they learned, and how their thinking or understanding changed through what they learned.
- Students were asked to reflect on how they learn best, what works and what doesn't work for them as learners.

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

Reduction of the reluctance to take risks in their learning. Different students showed new leadership skills through the variety of learning experiences that were offered. Students developed ownership of their learning. They also developed real empathy and expressed a genuine concern and care for the wrongs of our history and have changed their views about current situations as a direct result of their learning. We have helped change some aspects of racist thinking in our classrooms and community.

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.

Teachers experienced a renewed spark of inspiration for this work. This was driven by a strong desire to make even deeper changes in teaching practices and it was supported by colleagues who were willing to be open and share their learning and teaching with each other. Our departments have been working for years on breaking down the walls and working together in this inquiry has helped continue this path.

We need to embrace that change is inherent to this learning process.

We are teaching students, not curriculum.

The involvement of our Vice Principal, Margaret Mattess, in our inquiry has been integral in helping us strengthen relationships with each other, with students and with community.

Next Year:

- The Vice Principal will be teaching Gr. 8 First Nations Studies in order to build relationships



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and will continue to be involved in our Humanities inquiry.

-Adapting pedagogy and the school structures enough that students continuing their learning experience new opportunities (numbers of students, flexible groupings) that promote success in student ownership of learning

-We will begin the year with these experiential, place-based learning aspects so we develop a stronger sense of community early on.

-Assistive technology will support learners with literacy skills that are delayed (eg. Google Read & Write).