



Networks of Inquiry and Innovation Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network

2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

School Name: Frank J. Ney

School District: SD#68 Nanaimo-Ladysmith

Inquiry Team Members: Wendy deGroot, Annette Noble, Leslie Raines, Terri Zolob

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Type of inquiry: AESN

Grade levels: Primary (K - 3)

Curricular area(s): Applied Design, Skills & Technology, Arts Education, Career Education, 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), First Peoples Principles of Learning, Flexible learning, Inclusion and inclusive instructional strategies, Indigenous pedagogy, Land, Nature or Place-based learning, Self-regulation, Social and emotional learning

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

Through the lens of Aboriginal Education and the opportunities of Outdoor Education we wanted to see if our students would develop a greater understanding and respect for diversity and our environments.

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?

As a couple of us were new to this school environment (and because it is in a more prevalent social economic area of our city) we were intrigued with the idea of nature education and encouraging our students to develop a deeper sense of place, a greater understanding of and appreciation for Indigenous cultures and knowledge. We hoped to create a community of learners that develop a lasting respect for nature, themselves, and each other. We felt that by giving our students the opportunity, space, and time to explore,



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learn, and hopefully come to understand some aspects of nature that they could come to realize the impact they can have on nature both positive and negative. Furthermore, we also felt that it might better prepare our students to have the respect, empathy, and hopefully spark an interest for both environmental and Indigenous education.

We felt that the students in our community were having a disconnect with nature and all the important learning that takes place when one is 'in' nature. We also noticed that many of our students needed to be taught self-regulation and social responsibility skills and wondered if outdoor education might be the perfect fit. Therefore, we wanted to commit to having our students outdoors every week regardless of the weather to learn in a natural environment that would captivate, inspire, and intrigue our students enough to have them exploring, questioning, learning in nature.

The OECD principles of learning and the First Peoples Principles of Learning were at the core of our scanning process. The first 3 OECD (Learners at the Centre, The Social Nature of Learning & Emotions are Integral to Learning) principles are exactly the areas we knew our students required for them to succeed not only in the context of our inquiry but also throughout all aspects of their school life. All The First Peoples Principles dovetailed beautifully with the culture and experiences we were hoping to create and expose our students to.

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

As has already been mentioned above, we carefully selected Outdoor Education with an Aboriginal Lens because we were intrigued to see if it would have the impact on our students that we had hoped. We were specifically hoping that it would help them to grow their self-regulation and social responsibility skills as well as spark an interest for environmental education and respect for our Indigenous cultures.

What changes were you hoping to obtain for your learners?

We hoped that through weekly participation in an outdoor classroom setting that our students would:

- develop a greater understanding of self and place,
- that they would gain respect for our environments, our Indigenous cultures, each other, and learn more about themselves in the process,
- develop deeper sense of wonder and be inspired,
- to be able to ask deeper thinking question,



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- experience through hands on learning all that nature has to offer
- create a cultural change within our school community that sees the value in outdoor education.

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 school is uniquely situated behind a sport field that is next to a watershed called Wally Creek. This wonderful opportunity allows us to use the 'gully' between the sports field and our school as our outdoor education classroom. Up until this past year we felt that the amazing opportunity, that was literally in our backyard, was being overlooked. Therefore, we wanted to start to change the perception and past practice of outdoor education which until this past year was not a regular practice but rather 'one offs'. We hoped that by starting with our primary classes that as the students progressed through the grades they would have a better understanding of all that our outdoor classroom has to offer, and the expectations that come with learning outside of a classroom. In addition, we were also noticing an increase in our young students who were just starting their schooling careers being unable to regulate themselves at school in constructive ways, which led us to wonder if outdoor education would help.

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?

We learned and are continuing to learn about:

- the wonders of place based learning
- our local Indigenous cultures
- Project W.E.T.
- Learning In Depth (LiD) (a 'programme' created at Simon Fraser's Imaginative Education Faculty)

The one invaluable resource to all of us in primary (when taking 20+) students outside was additional staff support. Two of the classroom teachers in this project regularly scheduled their Ab Ed teacher to be that additional educator and support. The 3rd classroom teacher utilized her EA support during her outdoor education time. Without the use of 'Human' resources we feel we would not have been able to effectively manage or offer this educational experience for our students. Additionally, the support our administrator



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offered us was also valuable in that she encouraged our efforts and was a strong advocate for outdoor education herself.

We utilized our PLC time to collaborate, share our experiences, and to support one another as we all learned and grew together along this journey.

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

- As all classroom teachers taught primary (two being K teachers) we first felt that we had to coordinate the use of additional support through our Ab Ed Teacher and wherever else possible. We had to all plan our outdoor education time on the same day to utilize the limited 'human' resources and to ensure that there was only one class in the outdoor classroom at a time.
- We also informally created the basic 'structure' of our outdoor education time to ensure consistency, for example,
 - o we would start our lessons gathered in a circle,
 - o the teacher would read some short story or Indigenous tale that set the tone for the learning to follow.
 - o The students would be given a task that had been demonstrated in the classroom or at the outdoor classroom
 - o Teacher would remind the students of the expectations, safety, boundaries & measures put in place to communicate (ie – drum being beat fast = students return to circle to meet with teacher safely & quickly teacher needs to share some important/safety news, drum beating steadily = students return to circle to prepare for some other task or conclusion of outdoor education time)
 - o Students were set free to explore and do their given task
 - o All come back to the circle for closing 'Circle Time' – sharing of something the student is thankful for and to honour and respect the 'Traditional Lands' on which we were learning and exploring on
- We also had to inform our parents that Outdoor Education was going to be a consistent (weekly) and important part of their child's education and that they were responsible to ensure that their child had the appropriate clothing etc. to actively participate in all weather conditions.
- All 3 of the primary teachers had the same seasonal aspects to our Outdoor Education time, but other learning was specific to the classroom teacher's objectives. For example, our administrator taught grade 6 French and often incorporated nature into her



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lessons and would take her class out to experience their learning in 'hands on' way. We often shared our successes and trials during the whole process to learn with and from each other

- During our School Professional Development Days as a school we continued to learn about Project W.E.T and share our own experiences with Outdoor Education slowly trying to shift the culture and practice around outdoor education.

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

WOW, this is a tough question due to the 'nature' (no pun intended) of our inquiry. We feel that we made some significant gains and overall, we are very satisfied with our results. Our "Outdoor Classroom" has gone through some subtle changes that make it visible to most community members what the area is being used for and it is mostly respected for those purposes. The students themselves have embraced "their" learning area as their own and have created unique learning areas from an outdoor (mud/dirt) slide, to a 'band or stage' area with regular performances being created, a gathering area to sit and share, our open learning/exploring spaces, and carefully marked paths that denote human area vs green/nature/wildlife areas.

For a baseline, all we truly had was our intuition that Outdoor Education might be the answer to help our students self-regulate and gain some social responsibility skills which we saw as a definite need. In addition, we decided that this year was going to be the year to start the change in our school community culture around Outdoor Education as we along with our students learned about 'placed based learning'. We realize that this was not much of a baseline to start with, but the growth and rewards from our effort 9 / 10 months later are positive and informative. Outdoor Education has made an impact on all of us and especially our students. We the teachers (& learners in this inquiry) cannot even begin to express in words what this inquiry project has meant; however, our students would encapsulate it in the single word of thanks in the Hul'q'umi'num language - "huy ch q'u" saying it from their hearts at the same time as their hands are raised palm side up.

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 think that all of our comments above demonstrate the heartfelt thanks and appreciation we had for this inquiry project. It has made so many visible, and subtle changes within our students, our classrooms, and our teaching practices. Our students



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have gained some of the respect for diversity and our environments that we had hoped for. We as teachers have seen the value of dedicating a specific block of time on a regular weekly basis to learn outside. We look forward to building on our students' and our learning as we continue to incorporate outdoor education and all of its benefits into our personal teaching practices.

The advice we would offer is – “Just Do It!” – Yes, it will be messy, and cumbersome to start but the benefits are so worth it – you’ll see!