



## Networks of Inquiry and Innovation Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network

### 2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

**School Name:** Howe Sound Secondary

**School District:** SD#48 Sea to Sky

**Inquiry Team Members:** Heather Lafreniere

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**Type of inquiry:** AESN

**Grade levels:** Secondary (8 - 12)

**Curricular area(s):** Arts Education, 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), First Peoples Principles of Learning, Formative assessment, Indigenous pedagogy, Social and emotional learning

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

Our focus was on integrating Aboriginal content and ways of knowing, being, and doing into more curricular areas.

**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?

Upon scanning, it became evident that the integration of Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing continued to be found in the same areas of the school - social studies classrooms, English First Peoples, and some other efforts in other pockets of the school. We understand that it is important for our learners to see this integration in all curricular areas. In particular, it is important that more staff become familiar with the First Peoples Principles of Learning, and develop strategies for integrating these practices into classrooms. In terms of the integration of Aboriginal content into curricular areas, our scanning indicated that this is happening in more areas than in the past, but work can continue to be done in this area.



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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?

By choosing this area of focus, we hoped that Aboriginal learners would see themselves reflected in more curricular areas. By focusing on Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing, we hoped that students would be able to find ways of demonstrating their learning that worked better for them. As our wider school goal focuses on assessment, it seemed natural to focus this inquiry in this way, as it ties into the bigger goal of enhancing student choice in how they demonstrate their learning.

**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 hunch was that narrow and 'traditional' (in the school sense) methods of assessment were not sufficient in allowing Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing to be reflected in how students are assessed. By focusing on traditional pen and paper tests, we thought that other ways of expressing learning were not being valued.

**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 explored circle processes, the First Peoples Principles of Learning, and various tools for demonstrating learning.

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

The strategies we focused on were circle and allowing student choice regarding how they demonstrate their learning. We found circle to have mixed success. It became quickly apparent that it is important to clearly define norms and expectations of circle discussions, so that the time is focused and constructive. When circles are used in a way where students have a clear understanding of the purpose and expectations, we found them to be powerful for learning and for informally assessing what students know.

Allowing student choice in how they demonstrate their learning also met with mixed success. Some students were quickly able to choose a method of showing what they know based on their strengths, while others struggled with this as they had not previously had



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this type of choice. It is important that we help students with these choices and to teach them a variety of skills to allow them to make a choice that works best for the type of content and the goals of the learning.

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

We saw the beginnings of a difference through the use of circle and enhancing choice in students' demonstration of their learning. In classes where circle was used, students became more comfortable with the process over time, and we were able to informally assess learning / check for understanding. Enhancing choice in demonstration of learning was a good start in the integration of Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing into curricular areas. As the year progressed, students became more comfortable with this choice and were better able to choose assessments that played into their individual strengths.

**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.

This inquiry demonstrated for us the importance of continuing with a similar inquiry over a number of years. One year is not enough time to truly learn and implement strategies that make a substantial difference for learners. We will continue with these two areas in the future as we move toward further integrating Aboriginal Ways of knowing, being and doing into our practice.