



Networks of Inquiry and Innovation Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network

2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

School Name: John Barsby Community Secondary

School District: SD#68 Nanaimo-Ladysmith

Inquiry Team Members: Principal Deb Marshall, dmarshall1@sd68.bc.ca; Vice-principal Carol Girard, cgirard@sd68.bc.ca; Vice-principal Jeff Hasenauer, Jeff.Hasenauer@sd68.bc.ca; Counsellor Natalie Sorensen, nsorensen@sd68.bc.ca; LEAP Teacher Ed Mulrooney, Edward.Mulrooney@sd68.bc.ca; Chef Holly Knox, Holly.Knox@sd68.bc.ca; Counsellor Melissa Brown, Melissa.Brown@sd68.bc.ca; CYCW Margit Larsen-Rogers, mlarsen-rogers@sd68.bc.ca; CYCW Ray McDonald, rmcdonald@sd68.bc.ca; Aboriginal teacher Donna Flett, dflett@sd68.bc.ca; Aboriginal Education Assistant Vivian Aarset, vaarset@sd68.bc.ca; Aboriginal Education Assistant Chris Jones, cjones2@sd68.bc.ca; Aboriginal Education Assistant Val White, VWhite@sd68.bc.ca; Education Assistant Charlene Harbo, CHarbo@sd68.bc.ca; other Barsby staff members as needed, and community members, agencies and teams as needed.

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Type of inquiry: AESN

Grade levels: Secondary (8 - 12)

Curricular area(s): Career Education, Language Arts - Writing, Inclusion, Planning, Self-Awareness and Self-Confidence

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, Growth mindset, Inclusion and inclusive instructional strategies, Indigenous pedagogy, Self-regulation, Social and emotional learning

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

Our focus was to continue our work on last year's "Hey, How About This Selfie? Klick Here!" project, with a new core group of 20 vulnerable, high-risk junior secondary students (mostly Gr. 8-10) to provide story and workshop experiences that run once a week for the school year with the object of reducing the students' risk behaviours, helping to create positive self-images, and increase self-worth for the students as well as relationship building



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between the students and the school community.

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 scanning was similar in process to last year's: counsellors, administrators, and Aboriginal education staff reviewed student files and held personal interviews with our identified vulnerable youth to evaluate and re-evaluate the behaviours and concerns that were impeding the youth's growth, both personally and academically. We also had the youth complete an "I would like to be. . ." (a "where would you like to go/grow next") form at the start of this year's program. Students were for the most part still being seriously impeded academically by the overwhelming concerns and anxiety they had in their personal lives. This year, the youth identified self-confidence, self-esteem, and personal relationships with girlfriends/boyfriends/peers as key concerns. Our team reassessed our last year's program and began to draft new workshops that would address these issues and give the youth more personal power to live a healthy lifestyle so that they could begin to focus more on their education.

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

Our team determined the focus of this year's program by talking to counsellors, the students themselves, through student feedback in the first "where are we, what are we doing now, and where are we going" workshops, and through teacher reports, peer reports, and personal interactions with the students. We also checked in with our returning students to see how the summer had affected their strong sense of self when they left Barsby last June. We were hoping to see an increased sense of self through awareness and confidence, a stronger sense to set boundaries with peers and families, a stronger and healthier attachment to school and school communities, and an increase in attendance and academic performance.

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 were a bit surprised to find that self-confidence and self-esteem still loomed large on the horizon for the youth who returned from last year, but we recognized that a year in a youth's life sees many changes that continue to stress them and challenge their life



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choices. We continue to be challenged by the choices some of these students are making in the face of school community support, evidence, and experience from last year that indicates their choices are often still not healthy. We recognize the need for a positive and continually adaptive series of interventions with this group of youth to ensure they bond with adults in the school who can support their successful school experience and help them grow.

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?

Given how much our Selfie team learned last year about community supports, systems, and individuals for youth, our team was even more challenged this year to stretch our imaginations, contacts and connections, and service delivery to find new ways to reach the youth. We also have the extra challenge of a blended group of those students who have already experienced all the workshops from last year, and new young students who are just beginning this journey with us. We constantly sought the feedback of students and monitored which way their interests were heading as they developed self-awareness. We also sought feedback from other adults in the building that the students were now confiding in, in order to discover new topics for workshops. We used references from other teachers/adults, and also researched quite a bit on the internet. Quite often, we learned alongside the students, and this was a strong form of consolidating relationships. Our team met weekly to review and refine.

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

Our team met weekly to evaluate and plan. We began the year with some relationship building and “where am I now” activities for the students and also some cooking and eating together activities to gel the relationships outside the academic classroom setting. We mixed those initial start-up activities with some healthy community recreation activities to build the Selfie student community and just to have fun. As the year progressed and we gained the confidence of our students, we moved into the more serious and heavy workshop topics. Our planning group constantly monitored the effect our workshops were having and issues that suddenly arose for the students so that we could plan relevant workshops down the road. We kept complete year plans for both last year and this year with all the workshops and contact information of the presenters in the event others wished to access our knowledge and plan. Monitoring the student feedback and



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reactions/new interests was the most valuable strategy; it allowed us to deliver the most relevant content for these risk students.

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

Staff observations, and the student self-reflections and year program evaluation show that we made a huge difference in the majority of the students' lives and had a positive influence in all the students' lives. We also tracked academic performance and attendance. Staff noted such things as student body language going from closed and defensive to open and embracing, more smiles and laughter, more self-awareness, an improvement in personal hygiene, a greater sense of calm in the Selfie students, a stronger sense of belonging to the school community, more self-confidence, better manners, a growth in the ability to talk to adults who can help with problems, and support for each other even outside the Selfie workshops in addition to improved overall marks. The core group of Selfie students we retained until the end of the year (13 students from the stabilized group of 19, which is a reasonably high 68% retention rate) gave the Selfie program an average of 91% in terms of excellence and relevance. One student said, "Selfie made me think a lot about my future and what consequences are and how good things can be when you do the right thing." One student who struggles with substance-abuse parents, eviction onto the street by parents, etc., noted, "I learned to be able to ask for help and where I can go to for help when I feel down and depressed, grumpy etc. I have also learned to say NO to anyone who offers me alcohol, cigarettes and drugs" The young student who gave the lowest evaluation mark to the program (a 6 out of 10) was a student who was in her second Selfie year; she said she didn't get a lot from Selfie this year, and our team agreed this was true—she had gone from a rebellious Gr. 8 student in her first Selfie year, engaging in all sorts of high-risk behaviours and interests, with little attachment to the school community, to an honour-roll student participating in several school clubs with secure plans in place to attend post-secondary focusing on fine art. Our team did lose two of our return (two-year) Selfie students, and at first we felt we had failed them. They had yielded to pressure from each other and peers to engage in alcohol, drugs, and other risk behaviours of street youth, and they pulled each other out of the Selfie group and out of school. They tried to pull others out as well, and our planning team was afraid at one point that these two might succeed—but they did not. So, in the end, some of the skills we had been teaching the youth played out in the decisions of Selfies to stay in school and distance themselves from these particular two. The school provided a structure of community counselling and referrals supports for these two students and their families after they chose to leave school this year. We still have connections with these two youth who left, and will next year try again to connect in a stronger way. We will have to find a way of dealing with the strong



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pull of peer pressure and the feelings of failure that cause youth to give up on themselves.

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.

Our Selfie team learned how powerful a positive program that only runs for 1 1/2 hours per week can be in helping to change the lives of at-risk youth. This is the accomplishment/success we focused on when we hit rough spots in developing our program or in dealing with challenging youth behaviours. We also learned how powerful peer-pressure and persuasion is when constantly applied, and how it works to undermine already fragile egos in youth who feel they are failures. When this kind of peer pressure is applied it so easily draws the at-risk youth into even more at-risk behaviours and "like-groups", which exacerbates the issues. Our advice would be to identify your students, to make them feel special by being invited into the program you begin to develop, to build relationships, to be honest, to let the youth exert ownership in the program, and to persevere. Don't expect huge leaps in self-awareness and success, but when they come (and they do) celebrate at all turns--get a cake, chips, and pop and have a party with the kids! Give out presents! Be a role model--take risks yourself in sharing personal stories as they become relevant to the development of your students' awareness, and always find the time to listen when a student is ready to share. The work is hard, but the rewards are infinite.