



Networks of Inquiry and Innovation **Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network**

2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

School Name: Lena Shaw Elementary

School District: SD#36 Surrey

Inquiry Team Members: Marlene Brajak, Amber Geremia, Adrian MacLennan, Karveena Bains, Emily Pitman, Sandi Mustard, Jacquie King

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Type of inquiry: AESN

Grade levels: Primary (K - 3), Intermediate (4 - 7)

Curricular area(s): Not applicable

Focus area(s): Aboriginal understandings (for example, Traditional Knowledge, oral history, reconciliation), Community-based learning, First Peoples Principles of Learning, Teacher Capacity Building

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

Our focus was on the teaching staff in the school. We focused on increasing their comfort level, knowledge of Aboriginal content/perspectives and student engagement.

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 created a staff survey, which focused on assessing the knowledge and comfort level with Aboriginal content and perspectives. These responses are used to guide the focus of our inquiry. We also surveyed 23 of the Aboriginal Students. We found that 7 out of 23 students could not name two adults that think they will be a success in life, and 2 could only name 1 adult. Another interesting finding was about 50 percent could not connect their learning to where they are going. We used the First Peoples Principles of Learning in a few ways. For example, the principle "Learning is reflective", we used throughout the scanning process on the things that we were noticing. We also spent a lot of time sharing and listening to each other.



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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?

We hoped that by choosing the teaching staff as our focus that this could be a first step in embedding Aboriginal content and pedagogy through all areas of teaching. We thought that if teachers were more comfortable with this content and curriculum, it would manifest itself in classroom.

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 had a hunch that teachers were feeling overwhelmed and intimidated by the new aboriginal content and perspectives. Many teachers stated that they were feeling afraid of “teaching it wrong”, and that they were not sure about where to find appropriate resources. As such, learners might not have been getting enough learning experiences, because teachers were not exploring these perspectives/content in the classroom. After our teacher survey and interviews with the students, we felt that teachers needed more support to explore Aboriginal content and perspectives. Maybe the teacher’s apprehensions about teaching these areas was effecting how our students may be feeling valued in the classroom? How could we benefit all learners in our school through the exploration of the First Peoples Principles of learning?

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?

Our inquiry facilitated a lot of personal and educational development for all of our team members. Our professional exploration began with the First Peoples Principles of Learning. We consulted the Aboriginal Helping Teacher, and we met as a group to discuss resources and the ways to invite our teaching staff in to explore. Many of our team members attended Aboriginal Pro-D workshops that were held in our district. Two of our team members took the online MOOC course on reconciliation. We were all able to bring back what we had learned and share this with each other. Several of the members of the group attended an Aboriginal Science Seminar and were inspired to bring this to the school.

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



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Our staff survey had an overarching theme of teacher driven exploration. We found out that many of the staff were hesitant to go to a lecture on “what” and “how” to teach. Taking this into consideration, we organized two events to highlight resources both at the school and what is available in the district. In addition to this, our group members prepared a short presentation of how we had been using the First Peoples Principle in our classroom. We decided to primarily focus on one of the principles of learning in order to not overwhelm teachers or our team. These examples included connecting Identity to Sometimes I Feel Like a Fox, Thunderboy Jr., Visual Journals, Memory Bags – inspired by Shi-Shi-Etko, and My Name is Sepeetza. The teaching staff was then able to explore these projects and assignments, ask questions and share with each other. We also introduced a variety of ways that students could explore identity so that teachers were aware of how often identity comes up in the curriculum. We used the First Peoples Principle “Learning is experiential”, as we applied this to how we approached knowledge sharing with the staff. This enabled the teachers to have a hands on approach, rather than being lectured to. For our second event, we did a “tea and talk”. This was a drop-in science exploration event where the teachers could come in and have some tea and bannock while exploring the Science First Peoples Curriculum guide. We were able to borrow a wide range of resources from our district office to support our event. Our goal for these events was to provide opportunities for staff to engage with other staff in an open, non-judgmental learning environment.

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

The main difference that we saw was the level of engagement of the teachers. Our events seemed to create a positive environment for teachers to discuss and learn new ideas. We sent another survey out after our Professional Development events to get a sense of where teachers are now. Teachers reported that they are more confident with Aboriginal content and in particular infusing the First Peoples Principles of Learning into their practices. We got the sense that moving forward there will be a greater interest in future Inquiry projects regarding Aboriginal learning. We hope that this shift in the teacher’s perspectives will have an effect on our Aboriginal learners and benefit all of the students in our school.

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 professional learning focused on bringing the First Peoples Principles into the classroom in a multitude of ways. Our focus was on “Learning requires exploration of one’s



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identity.” Through this process we continued to recognize that “Learning involves patience and time.” Teachers are busy and with a large emphasis on Aboriginal content in the new curriculum, we wanted to support teachers and reach out to them with resources, ideas and let them take their learning to the next step. It is our hope that we will continue with this project next year, perhaps choosing a different First Peoples Principle of Learning. Our advice would be to approach the process with an open mind, take the time to really hear each other out as a team of inquirers, and take the needed risks into unknown territory to make a difference for your learners and your colleagues.