



Networks of Inquiry and Innovation Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network

2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

School Name: McGirr Elementary

School District: SD#68 Nanaimo-Ladysmith

Inquiry Team Members: Gregg Halfyard; Tonia Collins; Kim Dawson; Jennifer Cyr

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Type of inquiry: NOII

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

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): Core competencies (for example, critical thinking, communication, problem solving), Differentiated instruction, Experiential learning, Flexible learning, Formative assessment, Growth mindset, Inclusion and inclusive instructional strategies, Inquiry-based learning, Universal design for learning

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

Skills and strategies that students and teachers possess for the purpose of further developing increased awareness and use of higher order thinking.

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?

A variety of sources were used to finalize the focus area. It originated with reflection and conversation regarding the results from our NLPS school wide assessments. A couple of the specific areas regarding comprehension showed our staff a need for direct support around questioning, both asking and answering. Through staff and parent conversations, classroom observations, implementation of new curriculum our school goal was established and incorporated questioning in all subjects. It was felt that class based instruction has the maximum benefit, as it allows the development of common language



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and understanding among students and teachers. Staff used PLC times to share and plan. This allowed students and teachers to support each other within our community of learners. Learning questioning techniques and strategies was an important aspect of this unit.

The following four key questions were proposed as part of the scanning process.

1. How does learning to recognize levels of questioning help you as a learner/teacher in our school community?
2. When you are planning lessons how do you incorporate both factual and higher level thinking questions?
3. What would you like to tell others about your understanding and awareness of questioning strategies?
4. What would help you to better learn how to identify and ask higher order thinking questions?

Through conversations and observations the pre-assessment data revealed that most teachers were able to identify and incorporate basic levels of questioning throughout all lessons, but struggled with adequate wait time and emphasizing higher level questions. Students were also focused more on knowledge and comprehension questions and answers, rather than higher order thinking questions.

Since this is a three year process following our school goal, teachers recognize that learning involves patience and time and requires exploration of one's identity (as well as other First Peoples Principles of Learning).

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

Questioning is an important skill for students to develop in order to take an active role in their learning. Each student will learn to be metacognitive of his/her learning and to identify type of questions (based on Bloom's) to challenge his/her thinking. This focus matches the BC Ministry of Education Core Competencies and curricular competencies across subject areas.

By looking at McGirr's NLPS Assessment data results it was evident that our students' metacognition and ability to ask questions needed focus school wide. With the new BC curriculum focusing on an inquiry approach it was paramount that we address questioning both as teachers and learners as it is interwoven in the inquiry process.

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.



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It is assumed that in the past, strategies to promote questioning and growth mindset have not been explicitly taught and practiced across grades. Knowledge of these skills/strategies have been assumed to be innately known or have been taught on a need-to-know basis. The use of inconsistent terms and strategies weakens the reinforcement that might occur at the class and at the school level. Through both inquiry and project based learning students and teachers will begin to build common language and deepen their knowledge of the various levels of questioning.

Currently, McGirr is working on a school-wide sequence and common language focusing on questioning. Common language and reinforcement of specific concepts (following sequence) across the grades will increase both teacher and student awareness, knowledge, and confidence to apply various levels of questioning across the subject areas.

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?

Adrienne Gear, Reading Power (chapters on questioning) and Bloom's Taxonomy. Through self-awareness, the goal of these programs is to provide students and teachers with tools to support their ability to engage in higher order thinking. With the use of question stems and a variety of interactive activities, students and staff will build common language and engage in meaningful conversations.

Ongoing professional learning will include

- Professional Book Group focused on Making Learning Visible (inquiry focus – build questioning awareness)
- PLC check-ins on what students are working on and the development of common language
- Exploration of resources to support HOT strategies
- Use of picture books recommended through Reading Power and other resources for the purpose of building both awareness and skill level of questioning

McGirr staff enthusiastically supported growing our professional resources in our library around questioning. We used the recommendations from Adrienne Gear's Reading Power to have picture books (with accompanying lessons) available in an allocated section of our library. Our librarian also supported our journey by purchasing First Nations materials that fit the new curriculum and our questioning focus.

During our PLC times staff shared what was working and their individual classroom



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successes. This resulted in a developed sequence for our school around questioning (ex. K-1 will be able to identify what is a comment and what makes a question...). We also shared various question starter papers organized through BLOOMs for teachers to use as quick references during various lessons and teachable moments. One such resource is a HOT pot...it contains coloured questions related to the various types of questions established by BLOOMs.

As a staff having so many strategies and materials at our fingertips made the experience and focus of our inquiry valuable and doable!

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

Our focus began in September of this year and is a three year process. Our goal this year was to determine where teachers and students were at in relation to knowledge about questioning and how HOT questions could be incorporated across subject areas. Once pre-assessment was complete we determined that 'baby steps' needed to be taken in order to make a long term difference.

1. Revisiting Reading Power (Adrienne Gear) helped with a common focus and language. We set up a questioning section of picture books in our library and added to the collection. Using teacher sites on line we found lesson plans relating to many of the picture books and inserted a hard copy into the cover of those books. As classroom teachers found other books and created lessons, they too were added to our growing collection.

2. BLOOMs Taxonomy became our guide for higher order thinking and moving beyond knowledge and comprehension questions. Several resources (flip chart for reference; photocopy of question starters; BLOOMs lesson ideas) were shared with the staff as a whole and each member used as best fit with their practice. Conversation was built upon throughout the year as we discussed at PLCs and shared what was working and what was not.

To best meet the needs of our staff it was determined that having easy to access and use materials was necessary due to the demands of new curriculum and assessment practice. Recently, HOT pots were created and provided for each room, including non-enrolling spaces. These colourful pots provide questions on strips of coloured paper to match the different types of questions as outlined by BLOOMs.

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

All classrooms will be assessed for background knowledge using the attached pre/post-observation form. Assessment for learning (AFL) will be ongoing using a variety of



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written and oral documentation and observations. Staff will complete the pre/post-observations as one approach to assess growth at the conclusion of the study. Learners will self-assess their learning at regular intervals in both written and oral form. We will check in by asking, "How did you use the 4 Questions to help determine this?" as another way to direct student engagement and learning. Through on-going communications throughout the year focused on the four main academic subject areas as directed by our district, students reflected over the 4 questions, emphasizing where are you going with your learning?, how are you doing?, and where to next? From these communications teachers were able to move their class forward using our specific four questions more focused on teacher learning and questioning. Teachers will continue to assess for learning through activity participation, interviews, and observations of student and teacher actions.

As a stand-alone, staff verbally engaged their classes in one-on-one, small group and/or whole class settings regarding the first question (Can you name two adults in this school who believe you will be a success in life?). This focus took place during community building at the start of the year with check-ins throughout the year with specific students as needed.

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.

Upon reflection, the staff was hesitant to fully engage at the beginning. Many were feeling overwhelmed with all of the new requirements being asked of them with new curriculum, First Nations focus, and new ongoing assessment practices. Each member agreed that questioning was an important component and needed attention. Stating our school goal as an inquiry was a good decision as we all agreed that we had to focus on our goal anyway so thus began our first year of our three year journey.

Presenting little ideas SLOWLY was key to our progress. Providing materials so that teachers could easily grab and use was important to help all grades get involved. Carrying on the conversation at each PLC meeting, whether for a brief five minutes at the start or a more in-depth discussion for the entire meeting time, helped establish common language and make all feel more comfortable with taking risks as we were all learning together and no judgement occurred.

In the past inquiry projects have resulted in urgency and dramatic changes in short time frames. We entered ours with less pressure as we all agreed we would do what we could and reassess at the end of the year to determine our course for the following year. With our questioning section, including the First Nations materials, now set up and easily



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accessible in the library and HOT pots in each room, each staff member has a starting point for September and some lessons to aid their focus as well. As a staff we are in conversation about beginning the year with a focus on a questioning sequence the first week prior to classes being set...

Our biggest advice to any other school wanting to do a similar inquiry that involves so many staff with so many different teaching styles is to GO SLOW! Encourage, but do not demand! It was definitely advantageous to have our two I & I staff members take a leadership role, but still encourage all to share thoughts, ideas, and materials. Having the staff support by allocating .1 fte for a second I & I position from SST time enabled collaboration which was essential for successful completion of the first year for our three year plan.