



Networks of Inquiry and Innovation Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network

2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

School Name: Nechako Valley Secondary School Middle Years

School District: SD#91 Nechako Lakes

Inquiry Team Members: Mia Moutray, Leal Baumann, Tyler Clark, Travis Himmelright, Debbie Koehn, Michelle Miller-Gauthier, Denise Dowswell

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Type of inquiry: AESN

Grade levels: Secondary (8 - 12)

Curricular area(s): 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), Community-based learning, Core competencies (for example, critical thinking, communication, problem solving), Differentiated instruction, Experiential learning, First Peoples Principles of Learning, Flexible learning, Formative assessment, Growth mindset, Inclusion and inclusive instructional strategies, Indigenous pedagogy, Inquiry-based learning, Land, Nature or Place-based learning, Self-regulation, Social and emotional learning

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

Our focus was to increase student engagement through learning about our Canadian history from the perspective of Indigenous people, using place based experiences, descriptive feedback and core competencies as vehicles for reflective thinking and challenging conventional world views.

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 learners were quite disconnected from their learning, and they found it very difficult to take responsibility for their learning to try to improve after given feedback. Students often pointed to others or outside problems instead of looking inwardly to make improvements.



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Students would often use fixed mindset language (can't, I'm done).

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

We wanted to increase engagement in learning and we sought to use descriptive feedback to help us achieve that. We evolved to use place based learning as the vehicle for growth mindset thinking and descriptive feedback because that was more effective in engaging students in their learning. Knowing more about where we live (this place) it leads to better conversations and deeper understanding about who we are. to our ongoing inquiry into identity.

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 started going out to the land but we didn't prepare the students well for how to conduct themselves and how to learn in the nontraditional setting. We did not use or teach with the core competencies in mind. It was more teacher driven and content driven. We were also not using descriptive feedback to guide the learners. Learners were struggling to be successful and engaged. As a result, stopped going out to the land, and used more traditional teaching practices in the classroom.

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?

Aboriginal resources were key for our new learning as teachers:

- videos (Baker Twins on the truth about Columbus; Wab Kinew 500 years in 2 minutes; Chimamanda Adichie "The Danger of a Single Story")
- The Blanket Exercise by Kairos;
- Beaded Timeline
- Local Indigenous community members made incredible contributions to our learning by sharing their stories: Reg Mueller, Geraldine Johnny, Charmaine Nooski, Cheryl Bear (Author of The Honour Drum)
- Upstanders by Harvey Daniels and Sara Ahmed was a professional reading that guided our thinking about middle school learners
- Resources from Strong Nations publishing like 1491 and 1493 by Charles C. Mann



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

We used resources like books and videos and community members to enrich, deepen their learning by provoking new perspectives about our Canadian history from an Indigenous view.

-Some of us worked on developing conferring strategies, like written feedback, and a stamp that helps track whether verbal feedback has been given to a learner.

-We implemented an organization strategy to help students with their executive functioning skills for keeping track of their work (a folder system in each class).

-Various trips to the community and natural environment offered learning opportunities in Science, Social Studies. For example we learned about Sturgeon, the wetlands, the Indigenous communities and connected with professionals and knowledge holders in each of these. Students engaged in inquiry that was sparked by many of these experiences.

Key Trips:

-Playing on the land, canoeing helped set the tone for learning on the land. Plant identifications, art focus using paint chips to take pictures of natural items that match colours, geological studies (esker).

-Garbage pick up trip provided an experience that helped students understand that we are still abusing the land.

-We went to Nadleh First Nation for a day of Indigenous workshops offered by the community. Our learners were again, not as well prepared as we had hoped for engaging in respectful and effective learning in this nontraditional setting.

-Upon returning from Nadleh, we provided feedback and self reflection opportunities that focused on core competencies.

-We used crew time to reflect on our learning experiences.

-All students built traditional Aboriginal drums with the Carrier Language teacher.

-Canadian history was presented in a series of lessons that used videos, graphic books, current news in the media, local community members and experiential activities (The Blanket Exercise, Beaded Timeline). This was provocative and shifted thinking for many of our learners.

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

-Students were much more reflective about themselves and their learning. Their journal reflections and their verbal reflections were more powerful. They were able to use "I



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statements' rather than pointing to others to blame. They also could articulate how their thinking about our history and other current day issues have changed. Many expressed anger and guilt and wondered why we hadn't been exposed to these perspectives earlier. We learned we needed think about how to move forward together in a better way as a community and as a nation.

-It was very powerful that we were able to go back and use a less successful community experience (Nadleh) for reflection and improvement, helping all learners be successful on the next trip. We failed and then tried again (adults and students) demonstrating ownership of growth mindset thinking.

-Students demonstrated critical thinking skills and began to question why textbooks and media don't provide a more balanced view of history.

-This year students are more successful with student led inquiry. They are better able to self regulate and sustain purposeful self directed learning, showing greater mastery of core competency skills.

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 have only started the reflective feedback piece. It will come with more effective conferencing structures and strategies, and in embedding growth mindset language to help students learn to be alright with going back to improve something.

-We have learned to take more risks. We are braver now and have built a foundation that will take us further next year. We used First Nations content and connected with local people in ways we have always talked about but have not acted on.

-We need to be more purposeful in our intentions for learning with students and families and communicate more effectively so they understand that outdoor, placed based learning is as valuable as regular classroom learning.

-We need to continue to meet and co-plan as a team, focusing on cross curricular learning goals to acknowledge that real life doesn't exist in separated subjects.

-In order to be more inclusive of the French 7/8 crew, we need to more consciously design these types of learning experiences with a French language component (from delivery of information to books and resources in French)

-We also learned that doing this type of learning would be more effective at the beginning of the year as it would assist us with establishing our community of learners.