



Networks of Inquiry and Innovation Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network

2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

School Name: Prespatou Elementary-Secondary School

School District: SD#60 Peace River North

Inquiry Team Members: Jessica Dmytruk, Tanya Corstanje & Nancy Maxfield

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Type of inquiry: NOII

Grade levels: Secondary (8 - 12)

Curricular area(s): Social Studies

Focus area(s): Core competencies (for example, critical thinking, communication, problem solving)

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

We looked at the Critical Thinking Skills such as inference and synthesis as well as students' ability to acquire background knowledge.

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 have noticed that some students are not critical of the information given to them. It appears that the students, as a whole, are concrete learners and are often satisfied with reciting information. This has led us to believe they have difficulty with synthesis and inferencing. Generally the population is ELL and the emphasis has been on decoding rather than deep understanding.

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

Students have been presented with information that they adequately recount but when asked to give an opinion, they frequently struggle. The lack of inquisitiveness often limits



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the information they acquire thus limiting their background knowledge. We hope to develop their critical thinking skills with the intent they will transfer these skills to real life situations.

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.

Students are members of culture that appears to value the ability to decode and recite information. We are hoping to support the culture of the school to also include asking and supporting opinions and, in the process, developing additional background information. The school question has to do with encouraging diversity and looking outside the cultural norms. We believe this question will support our students learning of diversity.

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 looked at the core competencies through a different lens by offering lessons focused on metacognition. The high school students in this study had little knowledge of core competencies in general and therefore, were less aware of the competencies imbedded in the curriculum. Class lessons and assessment opportunities were intended to raise student awareness of competency skills. Over time, the lessons also gave opportunities to exercise critical thinking, as the lesson intentions were clear at the onset.

From the onset, we intended on using student-friendly rubrics. We quickly recognized the importance of allowing the rubrics to evolve as our own learning guided changes in our intentions. Our understanding of how to weave the Core Competencies into the Social Studies curriculum developed quickly as we changed the rubrics focus completely after the first lesson.

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

We noticed that students had a good understanding of the mechanics of writing but lacked critical thinking skills necessary for depth of thought. Students appeared to not appreciate that writing is both a process of doing critical thinking as well as the product of critical thinking. In the past, Jessica was able to loop with her students, in some cases up to four years, and she found many Gr. 12 students were more prepared to critically discuss topics. This year's group of Gr. 9 students were given an opportunity to be more focussed on



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critical thinking skills at an earlier grade. This was, in part, a function of their teachers being involved with NOII. This was also because the new curriculum adjusts the learning focus onto skills rather than merely topics.

We started the semester by introducing students to a rubric focussed on content and found the class discussions and intent of the lessons were actually more concerned with problem solving and critical thinking. We generated a new student-friendly rubric more focussed on the depth of thought rather than merely the ability to summarize.

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

As this case study was based on a semester-long course, it was interesting to recognize how Jessica was able to adapt her other courses, including those in second semester, to include additional critical thinking.

The grade 9s, from this year, will move into grade 10 as a contained cohort. Jessica will again teach them Social Studies and may also have the opportunity to teach them English 10. A preferred method would be to create a Humanities course for Gr. 10 and 11 students to run full year. This would provide more time to work deeply on the concepts of Critical Thinking, Opinions and Inferencing that span the learning outcomes of both Social Studies and English curriculums. It is important to continue to build on the skills learned this year as well as provide them a focal point for their learning goals in Grades 10 to 12.

The scale we used was Not Yet=1&2; Approaching = 3&4; Exceeding = 5&6

For Fall 2016 =16.7% were NY/1 and 83.3% were NY/2 (there were no students above a 2)

For Spring 2017 = 0% were NY/1 and 1.2% were NY/2;

68.8% were Approaching/3 and 18.8% were Approaching/4

There were NO 5 or 6 and there were 3 final writes that were either incomplete or plagiarized

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 originally had planned our inquiry around using Reading for Information but we found that students' responses were superficial and only looked at their retention of historical details. As we became more aware of the broad-reaching aspects of the new curriculum, we became more interested in how teaching thinking skills in Social Studies could benefit students in other academic and real-life situations. We developed a rubric to support student learning that highlighted critical thinking and supporting opinions.

We also used a six-point rubric to allow for more flexibility in assessment and recognition of high/low achievement in each of the Emerging, Developing and Mastering levels. We



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also found the 'new & improved' rubric demonstrated the complex aspect of assessment. We would recommend that future work focus on a small, yet specific, goal and to allow the class to direct the learning as it may be necessary to change direction a number of times.