



Networks of Inquiry and Innovation Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network

2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

School Name: Rock City Elementary

School District: SD#68 Nanaimo-Ladysmith

Inquiry Team Members: Cathy Fowler, E-J Boyd, Sue Derosa, Eileen Jubinville

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Type of inquiry: NOII

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

Curricular area(s): Assessment

Focus area(s): Core competencies (for example, critical thinking, communication, problem solving), Formative assessment, Growth mindset, Self-regulation, Student Self-assessment

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

How does self-assessment impact a student's performance at school?

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?

Each Inquiry Member chose a sampling of students from grades 3-7. We asked each student the four scanning questions, elaborating and explaining the questions where necessary. We included in the questions: Why do you think learning is important? What was really clear was that all of the students knew that there were caring adults who believed in them at school. They all could name topics or subjects they were studying but not all could isolate the big concepts or why they were studying these topics. This was true of where they were going with their learning also. They could identify specific traits relating to subjects they needed to work on but only a few were able to look beyond the subjects to the bigger picture of learning beyond school. In general students identified their grades or teacher's feedback for; "How do you know how you are doing?" Self-awareness and student voice was only present in students who have been directly taught these skills. These trends were common across all the grade levels. We want our students to understand their role in learning and the importance of learning beyond grades or teacher feedback. Being



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self-aware of how they are doing in their learning and in the school community will empower them to be self-advocates for their learning and social-emotional needs.

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

The needs of the students' at Rock City have changed dramatically in the last few years; programs used in the past are no longer meeting those needs. Our counselor is seeing a large increase in her student load with more and more requests from both teachers and students for counselling interventions. Students are not displaying evidence of being self-aware of their actions, feelings, responsibilities and learning. Self-assessment is also a focus of the new curriculum and reporting standards.

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.

Existing programs, culture and mindset of Rock City no longer seem to be effective. We are seeing an increase in negative behaviours in many areas of the school, which is evident by the number of referrals to the office and to school-based teams. The new reporting standards require students to self-assess their learning to a greater degree than in the past, to do this they must be self-aware and understand how to assess their learning and well being at school.

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?

After deciding on Student Self-assessment we shared our goals with the teaching staff and decided to focus on a few key areas to get started.

During our PLC meetings we explored the Growth Mindset theory as a way to draw student's attention to their learning and their ability to learn with a focus on effort as opposed to output. Teachers were given examples and lessons to use with their students focusing on how effort is key to learning. This has resulted in a year-long, school-wide implementation plan to be started next year, using the Mindup curriculum resources and strategies, videos and shared grade-grouping lessons that will be implemented next school year.



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We gathered and created a self-assessment resource of information, examples, templates, rubrics, and lists by exploring what other districts are using with a focus on the Core Competencies. We used the model of “Successful Learner Traits” from S.D. #71, Resources from S.D #62, and S.D. #36 as well as Provincial Curriculum updates and our own district initiatives, to develop “I Can” statements, a common language for our school around the Core Competencies and individual student learning goals and templates for self-assessment.

Our school counselor introduced, taught classes and held information sessions on using “Zones of Regulation” The Zones curriculum provides strategies to teach students to become more aware of, and independent in controlling their emotions and impulses, managing their sensory needs, and improving their ability to problem solve conflicts.

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

After the teaching staff had some time to work with their students and try various strategies we came together to discuss our progress. Staff shared strategies they are using and what they learned along the way. Teaching staff noted they used scales, rubrics, checklists, conferencing, 2 or 3 stars and a wish, using “I can” statements with emoji-like happy/sad faces, and daily planner “I Can” statements, were all working for them. Our early primary teachers noted that student self-assessment was difficult and was done mostly verbally and if done as a class it tended to be more directed.

These strategies had to be explicitly taught for effectiveness with clear examples starting small and starting with a highly successful activity to assess was important. Conferencing is difficult in the lower primary grades, this is where our team was able to step in and support teachers in conferencing with their students to work towards achieving an authentic student voice.

A group of teachers chose to try Freshgrade as a way to communicate student learning and capture student voice. Other teachers opted for either digital portfolios using G-Suite or more traditional folder portfolios to show student growth and development over time. Each portfolio option included an opportunity for student voice. A wide variety of tools were used to capture student voice including voice to print on Google Doc,

Zones of Regulation language was consistently used daily within the classroom for students to do periodic check-ins throughout the day on their emotional level, and was encouraged



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to use self-regulation strategies to either increase or decrease energy levels accordingly. This encouraged self-reflection and awareness, as well as independent use of self-regulating methods. It built a common language base for expression among students and teachers.

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

This is our first year with a concentrated focus on student self-assessment. What we noticed was that self-assessment for our most capable students improved their overall effort and quality of work, while self-assessment for our struggling learners added a level of anxiety. What we learned from this is that the type of self-assessment has to be individualized along with the assignment for these learners. Teachers and students need a variety of strategies and tools to achieve an authentic self-assessment.

Changing the mindset of the students and their parents to accept self-assessment as a valid form of assessment is a challenge that we will continue to face. Though most teachers have used self-assessment in their teaching for many years the focus was not always on “how” they were learning, but more on “What” they were learning, this shift is difficult for some students and we still see statements such as “I could write more” or “I answered 4 of 5 questions.” As our students become familiar with checking in with their learning more often it will become easier for them and for their parents.

In reviewing samples of student self-assessments from the beginning of the year to now we have noticed that, students tended to self-assess the quality of their work and not the effort they put in. When the mind shift is established that effort is as important as the content, students of all abilities were able to assess where they were in their own learning continuum based on their effort and level of understanding. This is particularly important in assessing the Core Competencies with students. The use of collaborative and activity specific “I Can” statements changed how the students view their classroom experience from a passive to an active role in learning.

Zones of Regulation Learning was a tool that offered students the opportunity to learn that emotions are fluid and that we have control over them. With visuals in the classroom, they served as a quick reference point for immediate reflection, and then the opportunity to provide them with a sense of control over regulating and balancing their own emotions. This contributed to the growth mindset of student thinking because it demonstrated to them that they are capable of change and growth in their emotional control, instilling confidence that they could become a more balanced and emotionally regulated learner.



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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.

What we learned for our first year with a focus on Student Self-assessment was that we need a common language across the school and perhaps across the district. We are working to develop a common language through the use of posters, shared lessons and our resource binder. Students must be explicitly taught how to self-assess and why this is important to avoid simple, "I did good" statements. Some other stumbling blocks we are addressing are student accountability, which we feel will come with guided support and practice, lack of motivation, time restraints, range of ability and a concern students are not assessing truthfully for themselves or for wanting to please the teacher. Another concern is that parents are not supporting student-self assessment as a legitimate form of reporting. We are addressing this with Show-case of learning events where the students can share with their parents not only the output but the input involved in the process.

Our team determined that we had a successful first year with this focus and plan to explore and implement a school-wide Growth Mindset program to shift the focus from student output to student input to support students in assessing their learning and well-being in the school. We will be looking for more creative ways for student self-assessment at all grade levels, especially in the K/1 grades where it is difficult to achieve authenticity. We are continuing to establish a common language with exemplar examples so students become familiar with the process and expectations.