



## Networks of Inquiry and Innovation Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network

### 2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

**School Name:** Sea to Sky Alternative

**School District:** SD#48 Sea to Sky

**Inquiry Team Members:** Susan Leslie, Allison Deruiter, Chris Wells, Kat Ast, Steve Evans

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**Type of inquiry:** AESN

**Grade levels:** Secondary (8 - 12)

**Curricular area(s):** 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, Aboriginal Education Outreach Program

**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, Transitions

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

Student engagement and connection in an Aboriginal focused alternative school setting, located in Lil'wat Territory.

**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?

My inquiry question last year was focused on an awakening toward decolonizing our learning space and my own practice as an educator. This involved seeking ways of exploring 'reconciliation as an inclusive process'. Building off of that path, my scanning process this year has been based on taking steps forward into building appropriate engagement that



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ignites students in cross-curricular learning that is rooted in reconciliation. In doing so I have explored the following questions with my students and co-workers:

“What passions ignite you in your life?”, “What changes would you like to see in the world?”, “How do we participate in positive change?”, “What are some of the deeper meanings in our life experiences?”, “How can we express these ideas in different creative forms?”

I have learned that to really unpack these conversations in a way that works for our students and their own unique life experiences, it is typically far more effective to take a meandering approach that enables them to “go to that place” of learning, if they decide that it feels like a safe place. This has led me to the question:

“How can we explore reconciliation education across the curriculum and in both direct and indirect ways?”

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

Building off of my inquiry from last year, I chose to seek a more action oriented focus for this year that presented a more directive tone. I also feel like I am in a much more mature and stable position this year and am positioned to be able to better support students on a comprehensive learning journey that utilizes reconciliation education to build student connection and engagement.

**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.

The unifying factors that have brought our students to our program involves an overarching disconnection and marginalization from their learning experience. For some this comes from challenges with mental health, others it is social-emotional, for many, a learning difficulty and for most this is also connected to endemic poverty and experiences of racism. When it comes to interests, life experiences and learning styles, we are perhaps one of the most diverse classrooms I can think of, unified however, by marginalizing experiences in our educational experiences. Therefore, working to pull students into a form of ‘active learning’ and control of the educational experience appears to be of a high importance. My hunch so far is that by seeking creative ways of incorporating reconciliation education across the curriculum and by giving the students voice and choice, this will



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increase their feelings of engagement in the learning journey.

**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?

- NOII Conference
- Learning and applying best practices to implement Project Based Learning across the curriculum
- Applying formative assessment practices that include self reflection for students in an alternative education environment
- Co-teaching and Co-planning
- Observe and evaluate Co-worker in the Learning Expeditions Program at Statmus

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

As our school year begins to draw to a close, I have been reflecting deeply on our areas of success and areas for needed growth. Our graduation rate this year has doubled in size, a result of many factors. Through the added teacher support we had this year, this enabled us to create a more comprehensive support system that 'wrapped around' our individual and collective student body. This has enabled us to support students' social-emotional needs and also to provide a creative, dynamic and adaptable learning experience. This has led to better student attendance and engagement in such a way that we are forming a 'critical mass' that leads to a re-creation of the same momentum (i.e. lower anxiety = better attendance = more learning = feelings of success = lower anxiety = better attendance..... and the cycle re-creates).

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

We have made noticeable differences through our work this year. This is most notable in the connections we have created and fostered with our students and the community. It is also evident in our successful graduates. However, I perhaps feel most proud of the noticeable increase in engagement our students have shown in their learning. With engagement has come better attendance, more learning and the honing of important skills.



## Networks of Inquiry and Innovation Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network

### 2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

As our students improve their literacy skills, their confidence also improves, which makes them even better equipped to face the next challenge.

**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.

I have learned that we are on a good track, and that the answers really do exist within ourselves. With some small tweaks, it has been possible to invoke significant change, but we must keep up the momentum and not veer from the path. Next year I am tentatively considering focusing the inquiry on the area of student assessment and critical awareness of their learning (especially in relation to cross-curricular projects). Connected to this would be an awareness of their own emotional self, brain function, well being, mental health, etc.