



Networks of Inquiry and Innovation **Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network**

2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

School Name: Squamish Elementary

School District: SD#48 Sea to Sky

Inquiry Team Members: Ailsa Lapp & Elana Barlas

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Type of inquiry: AESN

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

Curricular area(s): School community-building

Focus area(s): Community-based learning, First Peoples Principles of Learning, Inclusion and inclusive instructional strategies, Social and emotional learning, Transitions

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

We focused on school-wide community-building and leadership.

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 focused on our first question of “how can we enhance our sense of community across the entire school.” We were thinking of putting students into multi-age groupings but thought that before doing this, we should focus on breaking apart the concept of community and fostering the characteristics of a good community member. This applies to the OECD principles of learning as character development supports the well-being of the self and community.

We had monthly school assemblies around the virtues – all involving student contributions and some of which were run by intermediate students (OECD principal that learning involves generational roles and responsibilities). Students did learning around the virtues in their own classes.



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

We noticed that while there are groups of classes that regularly collaborate and work together, the sense of community between all age levels at the school and the leadership of the older students could be improved. We focused on building community across the entire school starting with creating learning opportunities around school virtues that are characteristics of a good community member.

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.

At the moment, there is limited opportunity for multi-age groupings (K-6). Many classes have big/little buddy relationships and the students enjoy this time together and form lasting relationships. We feel that if more opportunities were provided, the students would thrive in this sort of environment. Younger students tend to look up to the older students and would be more engaged if leadership students were running multi-age activities. This year we decided to focus on learning about the characteristics of a good community member through the virtues program and having older students take a leadership role during school assemblies. Next year our goal is to proceed with student-led multi-age (family) groupings.

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?

As a team we explored the virtues program. As this was our first year doing this, we felt it was important to take time and patience to implement the virtues in a meaningful way. Next year, we hope to involve the leadership students in the running of most of our school assemblies and to incorporate more student-centered perspectives on how to build and maintain a sense of community in our school. We have also learned that if the school virtues come from the students themselves, they will feel more ownership over them so we have decided to start our family groupings next year by having them come up with new school virtues by exploring the concept of community.



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

In September, a group of teachers decided on a list of virtues important to community-building. We assigned the virtues to various months based on current themes (ex. love around Valentine's Day, generosity around Christmas, etc.). Every month the virtue was presented to the students at an assembly organized by a group of teachers. Student perspectives and contributions were a key part of the assemblies. Most assemblies had a call-to-action including an opportunity for self-reflection. On the announcements a message or quote was presented that was connected to the virtue. Individual classes then also worked with the virtue in their classes.

Last year we did a lot of work around 4 spirit animals – bear, wolf, salmon and eagle which was continued quite a bit this year. For aboriginal day activities, students were split up by animal group. Next year our plan is to create multi-age groupings around the animals and the virtues and to involve leadership students more in the character development now that they are more familiar with the virtues. We also plan to modify the virtues based on what we thought was relevant to students and community.

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

- Students are more familiar with the terms and are able to demonstrate and articulate what the virtues mean.
- Concentrating on the individual virtues as a whole school has encouraged teachers to explore in more depth the characteristics of a good community member and created a shared language within the school.
- We did not accomplish all we set out to do but realize that this important project takes time and patience – creating a strong sense of community and getting all teachers on board is something that is going to take time.
- As a whole staff, we are realizing the importance of building community and appreciate the tangible process that is evolving.

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 learned that by setting structure at the beginning of the year for the implementation of



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the virtues, it gave us a goals to work towards. We also learned that building community is an ever-evolving process especially with turnover of teachers, new divisions being created, support staff, etc. and that we have created a good start. This year, it was a select group of teachers that organized the virtues assemblies and did a lot of the work. We learned that we need to have everyone on board in order for it to reach its full potential. Next steps for us are to build on virtues with staff with a more student-centered approach.