



## Networks of Inquiry and Innovation Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network

### 2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

**School Name:** WL McLeod Elementary

**School District:** SD#91 Nechako Lakes

**Inquiry Team Members:** Anne Geddes, Brigitte Atwood, Wanda Nemethy, Nadyne Leclerc, Patty Borek, Libby Hart, Michelle Miller-Gauthier

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**Type of inquiry:** AESN

**Grade levels:** Intermediate (4 - 7)

**Curricular area(s):** Arts Education, Language Arts - Literacy, Language Arts - Oral Language, Language Arts - Writing, Science, 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, Formative assessment, Inclusion and inclusive instructional strategies, Land, Nature or Place-based learning, Social and emotional learning, Universal design for learning

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

As we began to implement our revised BC curriculum, our focus involved improving learning for all students and meeting the diverse needs through hands on, engaging place based learning that is centred on the Nechako River watershed (the people in this place, and the ecosystems and resources that have supported the people and animals for ages).

**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 noticed that experiential learning last year helped students take more ownership of their learning, it engaged learners more and parents became more involved because the learners were so excited. We wanted to do more of that, but we also needed to help them develop their observation skills, problem solving and critical thinking skills while connecting



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them to their community more genuinely. We also needed to help them internalize new information (eg. scientific vocabulary and concepts) more effectively.

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

We believe 'everything is connected'. Learning locally and connecting to our Indigenous people, local industry and community held promise as a vehicle for improving learning through place-based experiences. Working as an intermediate team of teachers connected our learners across classrooms, creating a stronger sense of our school community.

**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 used to teach independently (silos), and we were teaching in more traditional ways that were teacher directed. We were reluctant to give more choice and let go of control.

**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 stayed together as a learning team across the professional development days through the year, letting student learning take us to new directions for our own learning. Some examples are: exploring the new curriculum and investigating local Indigenous resources; training in the Leave No Trace program; site based field work investigating places we would take the students to (eg. Noonla Nakazdli Koh -Omineca trading trail, Kenney Dam & Cheslatta Falls); community people & professionals taught us and our students (eg. Saikuz First Nations Chief regarding local culture and treaty negotiations, Ministry of Forests, New Gold Mines, First Nations community members regarding traditional medicines)

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

- Outdoor experiences to infuse the science and historical learning in real life places;
- Use of core competencies to embed self assessment in our experiences;
- Observe, Wonder, Infer frameworks for exploring new learning;
- Use of current & local events to engage and make the learning meaningful; (eg. the provincial government's decision to cull 6000 juvenile sturgeon was met with local protests)



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which resulted in the decision being rescinded)

-Persuasive writing frameworks to help students take a stand on issues articulately

-Encouraging many viewpoints to any given issue to foster genuine acceptance of others' perspectives

-Use of First Nations stories and literature (Stoney Creek Woman, Cloudwalker, Peacemaker by Roy Henry Vickers) and local resources (Saikuz and Settlers, Treaty Negotiation maps, Carrier Sekani Tribal Council cultural publications)

-Culminating event: Rivers Day celebration of learning that showcased each classroom's focus in a different way (from a student created play about the riparian zone, to models of a travois, to the impact of Kemano on Aboriginal communities, to campfire discussions about leaving 'no trace' in the forest, to Nechako White Sturgeon mini-workshops, to a student created digital story that explored the journey from the Nechako River to the Pacific Ocean)

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

Last year's exploration of hands on learning with building projects was our first venture into this type of experiential, collaborative, cross curricular learning across classrooms. We found students loved it but struggled with problem solving and learning the scientific vocabulary. This year, the field trips to the land set the stage well for the in class learning. It connected the students to the new learning and created an increased social-emotional aspect. Students developed strong attachments to 'this place'. The passion they developed along with the knowledge and skills about our Indigenous community and traditions, local industry and its history and impact both positive and negative, and about the flora and fauna and human impact on the watershed, surpassed our expectations.

**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.

Advice: Every teacher needs to be prepared to be out of their comfort zone, be willing to take risks and try new things together. The team's learning was flexible and people learned to fail and support each other through it. We didn't know if the kids would learn...it was risky to teach it another way (experiential). Teachers also didn't trust that they would be able to teach all the important information in a new environment when we were so comfortable in our classrooms. We found that students actually learned the information and skills more deeply! Next year, will continue the outdoor learning but we will begin to focus each grade on a different area more strategically connected to the curriculum. We will integrate even more systematically with more than just Science/Socials/Language Arts



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to ensure we are including Math, Art, Music etc. where appropriate. Our team is changing and we will need to do some groundwork in September to help the new teachers feel acclimatized.