



2017-2018 Yukon Education Learning Networks: Empowering and Engaging Others in an Inquiry-Based Professional Learning Network Celebration of Learning Discussion Template

Yukon Education
School: Takhini Elementary, Whitehorse, YT
Inquiry Team Members: Amber Alison

Your focus for this year: *How can I support my students to become more engaged in their learning?*

Scanning: I scanned my classroom for months, as it was a very challenging year. It didn't seem to settle down after the first few weeks, and with a group of very high-energy and high-need students, I needed to find some sense of regulation, not only for their sake, but for my own.

I noticed a few things in my scan: 1. there were a few students whose negative energy played off each other 2. most students are disengaged in their learning (minimal effort and participation) 3. students were much more disregulated during unstructured times (snack, transition, field trip) 4. students are much more disregulated OUTSIDE of my room than inside of it 5. I was exhausted, mentally & physically, and was letting the students' behaviours influence and affect my every day.

At the beginning of January, we addressed the negative energy situation by reconstructing our homerooms. I work alongside another Grade 6/7 teacher, and we team teach (I teach LA/SS & she teaches Math/Science), so we jumped on the opportunity to create a better learning environment for the students.

There was also another big change coming up for the students, that being a schedule change for their prep periods (languages, art, PE). I saw this schedule change as the moment to make whatever changes necessary.

During my scan, I focused on putting learners at the centre, recognize individual differences, emphasize the social nature of learning, understand that emotions are central to learning, and stretch all learners. By allowing students to choose what they are researching and how to present the information, it puts students at the centre and recognizes individual differences. I had students check in with a learning partner, which was emphasizing the social nature of learning. Because students can pick a topic or question they are passionate about, they can connect with the project emotionally. I maintained high, student-specific expectations for every student so they could all push themselves a little. Each of these principles aligns deeply with my core values of teaching, and with the teaching style I have adopted this year, with a new assignment and a team teaching opportunity.

Focus: After becoming aware of specific dysfunctions and internalizing upcoming changes, I decided to focus on the fact that my students are not engaged in their learning. They don't know what or why they're learning (even if I feel as though I've made it clear), they don't care about putting effort into their learning, and they don't believe that school in general is important. I want to believe if I can change some of these mindsets, I can change (at least some of) their disregulated behaviours as well as my own well-being.

Hunch: *My hunch is simply: If I provide my students the structure and opportunity to learn about something they are passionate about, they will engage in the learning process more willingly, and this will reduce disregulated behaviours.*

I think when we can break the habit of 'negative learning' and start to redirect that energy to a positive experience, it can propel the students' mindsets into a new direction.

New professional learning: Due to the self-imposed time constraints (schedule changes took place on Jan. 15) I needed to figure out what to do quickly. *Through research about how to re-engage disengaged students, I came across 'Genius Hour' and Passion Projects.* I figured if I was going to try this, I had a lot to learn.

One thing I've learned about doing a passion project is that it needs to start strong and be a very structured research and work time. I used the following resources quite consistently

<http://www.geniushour.com/>

<http://www.rundesroom.com/2013/11/passion-projects-in-classroom.html>

Taking action: Because we have two 6/7 classes, I wanted to make sure my students knew that Genius Hour was special for our class. I wanted to provide them with a few opportunities a week to work on their projects. Also I knew I had to commit to those times, so the students could commit to their projects. Finally, I had to SELL IT. I did this by creating a powerpoint that included videos from Kid President, we decorated folders, brainstormed 'fun ideas' and I booked the computer lab for our Genius Hour blocks so that they knew they could count on that time.

Seven Principles of Learning in an Innovative Learning Environment		
What works for learners?	What this means for LEADERS	My evidence ...
Put learners at the centre	Leaders must be relentlessly curious about what's going on for students in the system. Student learning is the driving force, but students aren't the only learners. In an innovative learning environment, everyone is a learner, including teachers, support staff, formal leaders, parents and others.	by allowing students to choose what they are researching and how to present the information, it puts students at the centre
Emphasize the social nature of learning	Leaders collaborate, cooperate, and support networked learning.	I had students check in with a learning partner, which was emphasizing the social nature of learning
Understand that emotions are central to learning	Leaders understand and apply the dynamics of social and emotional learning. They are attuned to their own emotions and motivations, and to the emotions and motivations of others—including the positives, like satisfaction and self-efficacy; and the negatives, like helplessness and anxiety. They understand how emotions affect performance.	because students can pick a topic or question they are passionate about, they can connect with the project emotionally

Recognize individual differences	Leaders understand the dynamics of their team members, including their strengths, interests, experiences, and gaps in learning. They draw on these differences and help everyone in the system to develop through carefully designed professional learning.	by allowing students to choose what they are researching and how to present the information, it recognizes individual differences
Stretch all learners	Leaders stretch themselves and others, but they avoid overload or stress that diminishes performance.	I maintained high, student-specific expectations for every student so they could all push themselves a little
Use assessment for learning	Leaders set clear expectations while being open to new possibilities. They continually assess what is working and where the gaps are. They always consider qualitative data as well as quantitative data. They seek and give meaningful feedback to promote learning.	
Build horizontal connections	Leaders are connectors. They connect activities, ideas and people, in and out of school. Their connections include partnerships in the community, with other schools, and with organizations at a distance.	

Checking: Quantitative survey results:

6/13 said they didn't care about learning before Genius Hour

3/13 said Genius Hour increased their positive feelings about learning

8/13 said they wanted to do Genius Hour again

Qualitative data:

1 student who has never completed a project, completed his project first

1 student wrote a reflection regarding Genius Hour stating "it's an opportunity for kids to prove they can learn without being forced to do things they don't care about"

100% of students participated to some level in Genius Hour research so this was a win in my books

Students are not used to having to critically and creatively think... so this was HARD for them to start, and continue their learning

Reflections/Advice:

positive results - everyone did something with their time

I would definitely do it again but I would need to change some things

- provide more structure for first project (leading questions, templates, etc)

- 1 hour blocks are better than 1/2 hour blocks - more time to get DEEP with their learning

- ensure they 'check-in' with their learning partner [more formally] to hold them

accountable and allow them to share their learning and progress

NOII is dedicated to:

EVERY learner crossing the stage with dignity, purpose and options.

ALL learners leaving our settings more curious than when they arrive.

*ALL learners gaining an understanding of and respect for Yukon First Nations ways of knowing
and doing.*