2017 - 2018 / NOII Case Study

School Name: Holy Family Elementary Whitehorse Yukon

Inquiry Team Members: Corrie LaLonde

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Type of inquiry: NOII Grade level: Grade 4

Curricular area(s): Applied Design, Skills & Technology, Language Arts - Literacy, Language Arts - Oral Language, Language Arts - Reading, Language Arts - Writing, Science, Social Studies

Focus area(s): Core competencies (for example, critical thinking, communication, problem solving), Differentiated instruction, Experiential learning, Growth mindset, Inclusion and inclusive instructional strategies, Inquiry-based learning, STEM, Universal design for learning

In one sentence, what was your focus for the year?
Our focus was to use various applied design activities to build social skills and help students develop a positive attitude towards learning.

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?

At the beginning of the year many students were approaching learning as a personal struggle that they were not winning. There was a closed mindset. Students believed they were incapable of many tasks, particularly with math and English skills. There was very little personal responsibility in learning and any obstacle, or new idea resulted in immediate requests for assistance. We observed that these attitudes and behaviours were not exhibited as strongly by the students during hands on science based experiments. The students would demonstrate innovation and curiosity during science activities. Upon reflection we decided to expand on applied design activities in the classroom, which coincided well with the new curriculum.

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

This area was chosen because the students responded well to the methods of hands on activities. We hypothesized that allowing students to fail or succeed after trial and error would build up resiliency and promote innovation and experimentation in the students. In addition, group activity work would increase upon social cohesion in the classroom.

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.

Schools are slowly adjusting to a student focused and group learning model. Desks are being abandoned for larger tables where students may work together. Sharing of school supplies is being encouraged. Because the change is new and slow some teachers still expect individual learning, despite creating a group setting in the classroom. Students in groups are often chastised for talking and sharing, expected to work in a similar manner to when they had their own desks. It is often frightening to release the teacher centered roll, instead providing learning opportunities and allowing the students to fail and succeed with only gentle guidance. We endeavored to step outside our comfort zones and old habits in order to embrace new learning and teaching practices.

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

We endeavoured to look for and use experiments and applied design activities as frequently as possible during the year.

The students were introduced to a coding website and were given the opportunity to follow courses at their own speed and create learning objectives for themselves. Initial introduction was at a level far below grade level in order to insure initial success. Students were encouraged to explore their new skills

and many created art, storyboards and games once they established a skill base. Most students finished courses designed for older grades.

School activities, such as the sale of local vegetables, provided the opportunity to do group baking activities in the classroom.

Introduction to stop motion photography allowed the student groups to create films using lego, drawings and various school supplies. The students created storyboards, worked together to create the films, edited their work, practiced scripts and applied sound effects and then presented the films to each other and school buddies.

The students, once again in groups, created a cardboard arcade using art supplies and cardboard boxes. Once the arcade was completed each student group created a short film explaining their games. The students created prizes from school supplies without prompting from teachers. The students were provided minimum guidance as they set up their arcade in the gym and the primary wing of the school was invited to come and play.

As the year progressed the minimum guidance and exploration approach became increasingly the style of teaching that was predominate in the classroom.

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

At the beginning of the year many students would engage in various work avoidance activities. Some would disengage, occupying themselves in conversation at inappropriate times and have emotional outbursts when confronted with adversity in learning or social interactions. Many students would vocally express that they were incapable to completing learning activities due to perceived faults in their skills or intellect. Over time as students engaged with each other during various group oriented applied design activities, and assisted each other in creating and presenting these activities, they each became more confident and built personal and group resilience. The students surprised their instructors by rushing to class after recess breaks, and they received many compliments for their behaviour and ability to interact socially during lunch activities. Music and library instructors offered additional opportunities for the students to engage in extra activities due to their general interest and group civility. Many students began exploring personal applied design activities, which they were always eager to share with the class. Students often assist each other with work, whether it is project work or math and English skills. I am very pleased with the end results. I have a class that works together and faces challenges head on. They recognize that failure is not a fault, but an opportunity relearn, confront a problem with a classmate or to approach a problem differently.

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.
In the coming year

As the year progressed and more applied design activities were introduced to the students it became clear that it was not any particular activity that was important. The learning, curiosity and confidence building occurred when the students were able to use a variety of tools, have personal autonomy, and be able to explore group dynamics. It is important to be willing to let the class explore without over supervising, the students must own their learning experience which allows them to be eager to show off their skills. Allow others to assist you in the classroom. I found co-workers were often volunteering to assist in management when interesting things are happening in the classroom. Additionally, students enjoy showing off their successes with other classes, particularly to their younger peers.