

Canada (British Columbia)
**Community of Learners Network,
Nanaimo Ladysmith**

Supplementary Information

Randerson Ridge Case Studies

RANDERSON RIDGE ELEMENTARY #68 Nanaimo Ladysmith 2007-2008

School Question

Will the explicit instruction of writing and reading skills accompanied with constructive feedback have a positive effect on students' learning?

Leadership Team

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Contacts

Mary-Lynn Epps, Kelly McKee

School Context/Community

Randerson Ridge Elementary School is located in Nanaimo on Central Vancouver Island, British Columbia. The area is north Nanaimo consisting primarily of middle class families with children that are well prepared to enter school. Parents are involved with their children.

Our K-7 school has had a writing goal for approximately three years and a reading goal for two years. The children are very inclusive and the school climate is warm and friendly. Population is 323 students.

School Inquiry and Action

READING and WRITING

Our first year in the NPBS (Network of Performance Based Schools) we focused primarily on improving reading comprehension skills using literature circles and the explicit instruction of comprehension skills using the resource *Grand Conversations*, by Faye Brownlie to guide our practice. Results from last year's spring assessment indicated improvement in student learning. Staff felt they wanted to continue to explore and expand the literature circle model. Our school goals also focused on improving writing skills. Through a district writing project we explored the work of Betty Schultze and Janine Reid using their anchor lessons to explicitly teach writing skills to students. In addition, we continued to expand our assessment for learning strategies using the Ministry Webcasts on Assessment to guide our practice.

Focus of our Inquiry

To improve reading comprehension skills, writing skills and implement assessment for learning strategies that provide feedback for students to improve learning. Students will be able to assess work according to the developed criteria and provide feedback to themselves and each other to improve the quality of their work. Feedback aligned to the criteria and incorporated support to answering the inquiry question of the unit.

Strategies

WRITING - Form book talk club to provide opportunities for coaching and collaboration using the resources, *Writing Anchors* and *What's Next for Beginning Writers*; Access District support through involvement in the Rotary Writing Project; showcase student writing products that demonstrate the various writing anchor tools at workshops, literacy lead teacher meetings and hallways; plan a school wide Collections Day to showcase procedural writing across the grades (on Collections Day students took part in a gallery walk and gave constructive feedback to each other regarding their displays, procedural writing and presentations).

READING COMPREHENSION - Intermediate teachers continued to expand and develop more literacy bins with support of the literacy lead teacher and the librarian, other literature bins were

developed with an Aboriginal theme that were supported and developed in collaboration with the District Aboriginal Resource Teacher, Laura Tait, which lead to the further development of an Aboriginal question submitted to the network; reading comprehension using non-fiction text was supported through the exploration of information circles using assistive technology as a means to further support student learning and demonstrate their understanding of text (this involved the collaboration and co-planning of the learning assistance teacher, Kerry Armstrong, the literacy lead teacher, Mary-Lynn Epps-both teachers also shared the grade 7 class); literacy initiatives have been shared at several workshops at the district and provincial levels.

Focus on Formative Assessment

Several teachers have been attending the Ministry webcast Assessment Series and implementing variations of the strategies in their lessons; the awareness of assessment for learning strategies have improved and are being discussed in a collegial way on an ongoing basis amongst staff. We have been using the older buddies to give constructive feedback to their younger buddies for reading and writing.

School Findings

(DART data)

Grade 3-7 - All Students

	NY		A		M		E	
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Fall 2006	14	27	48	96	31	61	4	7
Spring 2007	3	5	29	59	52	105	16	35
Spring 2008	2	2	27	35	54	107	12	33

School Plans for 2008-2009

Examining our DART results and through staff discussion of observations related to student learning it is agreed out focus will continue on improving comprehension skills using non-fiction text. We will also continue to work on our writing for information skills in the areas of science, math and social studies. We will focus heavily on the connection between literacy and numeracy skills.

Reflections, Advice

The challenges of finding opportunities to collaborate, co-plan and coach have improved with the development of the Mini-Network partnership with two other elementary schools. Teachers have expressed a strong interest in continuing the partnership next year and using it as a way to explore and share practices that are making a difference in student learning. Our ability to augment the leadership capacity of the three schools has also improved as teachers gain confidence through the encouragement of their peers. Multiple project work has also developed as we continue to expand our inquiry questions and find multiple windows of opportunities to explore our areas of interests to assist with student learning. We are coevolving as a professional learning community. Students are also benefiting from the collegial atmosphere. As students observe teachers co-teaching and giving feedback to one another to support instructional practice they realize that constructive feedback works both ways for teachers and students. Through our co-teaching and co-planning experiences we are modelling assessment for learning practices.

**#68 Nanaimo Ladysmith
2008-2009**

School Question

Will developing inquiry questions help to improve the reading of non-fiction text as demonstrated through written responses and persuasive essays?

Leadership Team

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Contacts

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School Context/Community

Randerson Ridge Elementary School is located in Nanaimo on Central Vancouver Island, British Columbia. The area is north Nanaimo consisting primarily of middle class families with children that are well prepared to enter school. Parents are involved with their children. Our K-7 school has had a literacy goal for approximately five years. The 342 children are inclusive and the school climate is warm and friendly.

School Inquiry and Action

READING, WRITING

Focus of Inquiry

This year our inquiry team focused on developing inquiry questions for students that integrated curricular areas and moved students to a deeper understanding of information. They used inquiry questions to guide their learning throughout a unit and additionally developed their own inquiry question that targeted an area of interest or strength within the unit. The inquiry team of teachers had the students celebrate their learning through a learning showcase where community and school were invited to visit and discuss with students what they learned.

Strategies

Teachers involved in this work have been using literature circles and information circles to support students in clarifying information about the unit of inquiry. Integrating science, social studies, language arts and healthy living practices enabled us to connect to multiple inquiry areas of our practice. Focusing on explicit instruction and the use of assistive technology to improve written responses and persuasive essays has helped students improve their writing skills and communicate a change in their thinking, actions and beliefs in relation to the inquiry unit.

Focus on Formative Assessment Strategies

Through literature and information circles students were able to obtain ongoing feedback to clarify their thinking about the information they were exposed to throughout the unit. Criteria for written responses and persuasive essays were developed with students and aligned to the performance standards. Ongoing peer and self assessment opportunities were provided using the criteria to guide their conversations. The inquiry question gave students a purpose for learning. It guided their thinking throughout the unit. When they created their own inquiry question it motivated their learning and allowed them ownership in the process.

School Findings

2008 - Percentages Fully Meeting and Exceeding

Grade	3	4	5	6	7
All Students	63%	58%	64%	88%	86%

2009 - Percentages Fully Meeting and Exceeding

Grade	3	4	5	6	7
All Students	52%	36%	87%	77%	93%

School Plans for 2009-2010

Teachers on the inquiry team would like to continue the development of integrated inquiry units with the culmination of learning showcases. The inquiry showcases can provide a process for school and community connectedness and model learning that encourages deep understanding and transformation of students thinking, actions and beliefs. We would also like to encourage the integration of Aboriginal literacy into our inquiry units as a means to respect and broaden our understanding of the Aboriginal Community.

Next year we would also like to explore the concept of numeracy circles. We will take the factors that have worked well in literature and information circles and apply it to numeracy circles. This will allow for deeper conversations in math to clarify understanding. It will also align more closely to the rest of the learning model we are developing.

Reflections, Advice

Applying the inquiry model with students has enabled us to see how closely teacher and student learning is mirrored. As we engage students in conversations about what is working, what needs to be rethought and what to do next, we recognize we are engaging in the modeling of lifelong learning and weaving assessment as learning into our practices and our students learning practice. They have developed excellent metacognitive skills through inquiry.

Universal Design for Learning has also supported our students in using assistive technology to support their reading and writing. Students with special needs in our classrooms are able to integrate fully into the learning process due to the scaffolding of support and the climate of a community of learners.

Thinking about deep questions of inquiry for teachers that encompass multiple inquiry areas such as: literacy, healthy living and Aboriginal literacy, we were able to draw connections in the planning process and work more effectively in meeting our goal areas.

RANDERSON RIDGE ELEMENTARY
#68 Nanaimo Ladysmith
2009-2010

School Question

Will student learning improve in the area of reading for information and math problem solving if we focus on non-fiction reading strategies and problem solving skills with thoughtful feedback on student work?

Leadership Team

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Contact

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School Context/Community Involvement

Randerson Ridge Elementary School is located in Nanaimo on Central Vancouver Island, British Columbia. The area is north Nanaimo consisting primarily of middle class families with children who are well prepared to enter school. Parents are involved with their children. Our school has approximately 330 students. We have a .2 Lead Literacy Teacher who works with teachers to support inquiry practice, the six assessment for learning strategies and the four big ideas. Inquiry based teaching has supported significant growth in student and teacher learning since our involvement in the Network over the course of the last four years. In addition, we creatively planned to cross fertilize the work of the teacher with extensive numeracy expertise by releasing them through the literacy lead teacher time.

School Inquiry and Action **NUMERACY**

Will student learning improve in the area of reading for information and math problem solving if we focus on non-fiction reading strategies and problem solving skills with thoughtful feedback on student work? The question was designed to improve students' math problem solving skills as well as reading of non-fiction text. Practitioners were at different stages of development in their professional practice depending on their students' needs. In an attempt to work more inclusively as a staff we decided to allow flexibility for involvement by designing a question that had a two prong approach.

Through collaborative learning partner discussions teachers were able to implement various strategies from Non-fiction Reading Power to improve their reading comprehension of non-fiction text in various content areas. In addition, some teachers applied the non-fiction reading power tools to a mathematical context in order to support students' understanding of story problems.

Strategies

Through our focus on improving reading strategies for non-fiction text we attempted to draw connections to the use of the non-fiction reading power tools to support our understanding of mathematical problems. We explored the concepts of using story boards in math to build a model of the problem using pictures and manipulatives. Once the visualization of the stories were developed students connected their pictures and models to symbols which applied their thinking about the story problem into an equation. As a result, students created a representation of the story in pictures, models, symbols and words with a step by step process that tracked their metacognition on a graphic organizer. In addition, they sometimes transformed their thinking by rewording the story with the unknown variable in a different place from the original write. (e.g. Unknown beginning, middle, end) This process of oral and written reflection allowed students to explore a deeper level of mathematical thinking.

Interfacing the above ideas with the Propeller Model components of assessment, inquiry and technology use, enabled us to deepen understanding through the concept of numeracy circles. Using a jigsaw strategy to chunk the math concepts with circle learning we were able to implement the assessment for learning big 6 strategies and clarify any misunderstandings students were having with immediate feedback. Students felt empowered as they entered circles as experts about one question. As experts they supported other students in improving their understanding of all the examples thus, solidifying the concept of a community of learners.

Teachers in two classrooms that explored numeracy circles found students were engaged and took ownership for their learning through an environment of trust.

In classrooms that focused on reading for information a broad inquiry question along with the explicit teaching of the Non-fiction Reading Power tools helped to deepen understanding of non-fiction text.

Focus on Formative Assessment Strategies

As we began to focus on a variety of ways to give students thoughtful feedback we shared ways we incorporated assessment for learning into our learning design. Primary teachers emphasized the importance

of giving immediate feedback orally since many of their students cannot read the information they wanted to communicate.

At the intermediate and late primary level we used peer and self assessment aligned to the criteria to give thoughtful feedback. (e.g. Strategies- *APE*, *2 star and next steps*, *CASE*) Teachers found that having these opportunities for students, gave them the chance to improve their work and raise their performance levels. As a result they deepened their understanding with ongoing assessment feedback opportunities that were aligned to the criteria. The process of circle learning also supported opportunities for thoughtful feedback. (e.g. information circles, numeracy circles)

Grade 2 Reading for Information Performance Standards Results

Fall 2009	0	5	15	3
Spring 2010	0	3	11	9

Grades 3, 6/7, 7 DART Data

Assessment	NY	A	M	E
Fall 2008	3	48	22	3
Spring 2009	1	15	37	23

Problem Solving Results Using Diagnostic Math Assessment and the Performance Standards in Grades 4, 6/7, 7

Assessment	NY	A	M	E
Fall 2009	9	21	29	16
Spring 2010	0	8	31	35

School Plans for 2010-2011

Our next steps will be to continue to develop curriculum based inquiry questions for specific math units, build on the numeracy circle concept, and continue to transfer literacy tools to improve number sense and math problem solving skills. These processes and tools will enable us to continually weave the big 6 assessment for learning strategies throughout our instructional design.

Reflections, Advice

Teaching with learning partners continues to be a necessary component to sustaining the thoughtful practices that improve student learning. As we engage in the teacher inquiry process we find it difficult to maintain the momentum of being nimble, flexible teachers without the support of a learning partner. Our learning partnership often mirrors a tag team approach. When one colleague begins to doubt or question their work we collectively problem solve to take us the next step forward. Without these professional relationships learning becomes exhausting and the pursuit of excellent practice that makes a difference to student learning often falters. Therefore, learning partnerships become a necessary criteria to improving student learning and teacher practice. When learning partnerships are embedded in research we collectively can make a difference. Professional book clubs and sharing of resources developed as an off shoot of our reading has supported our efforts in moving for