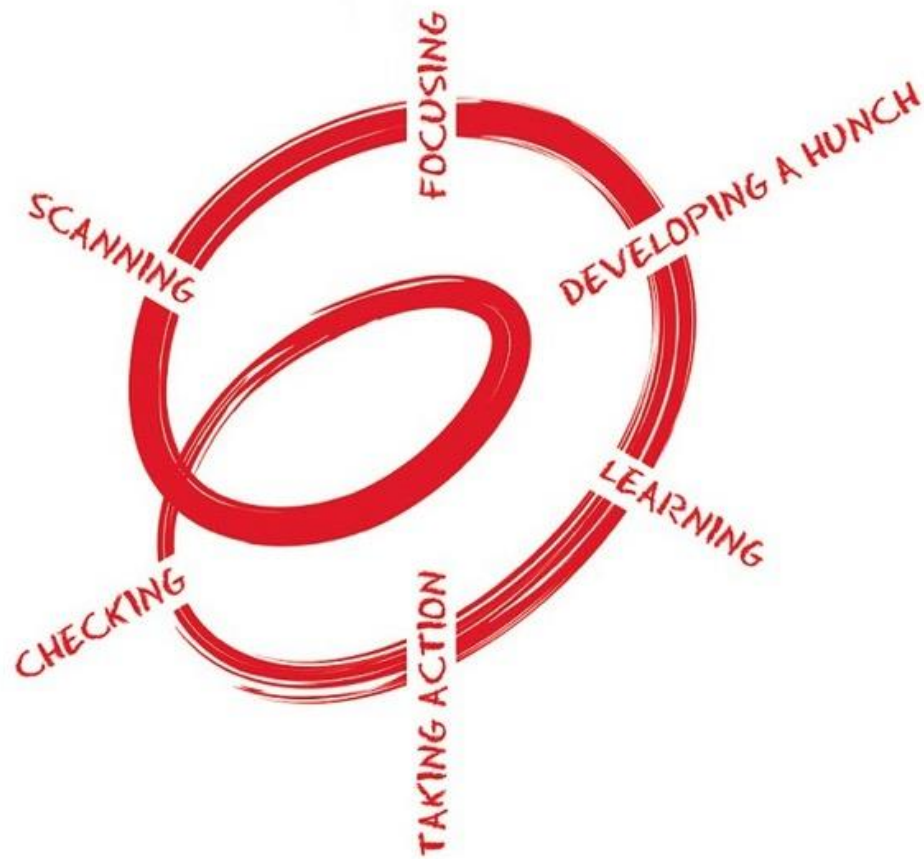




School District No. 67 (Okanagan Skaha)
School Growth Plan



"Spirals of Inquiry for equity and quality"
Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser



School: ConnectEd

School Context:

ConnectEd is a learning community that supports Kindergarten to Adult age learners. ConnectEd is umbrella name for a number of unique education programs, including Continuing Education, Home Learners, Middle, Junior and Senior Alternate, and Distributed Learning. All of these programs provide options for students and families. Students are enrolled at ConnectEd, which is a public school, and the student program is the responsibility of our ConnectEd staff.

Each student's learning is supervised by a teacher certified in British Columbia (parents are not teachers, but may help facilitate their child's learning).

Each student must be assessed on a regular basis, and receive provincial letter grades, report cards and a permanent student record – just the same as they would in any B.C. neighbourhood school.

Upon meeting requirements for graduation, students will receive a British Columbia Dogwood certificate.

We offer families:

- resources, support, and instructional assistance needed to plan and deliver a quality educational program reflective of individual needs, values and philosophies
- one-on-one student support services; i.e. tutorials, Moodle study lounge
- ongoing communication between families and our staff, using a variety of modes
- teacher-led ongoing assessment and evaluation, linked directly to provincial learning outcomes
- options in methods of course delivery, such as paper-based or online, determined after consultation with teachers
- unique opportunities for students to work with peers on an ongoing basis through a variety of activities

School Plan Scope and Sequence

This plan below highlights our learning journey over the past two years.

Scanning 2016-2017:

As a staff we our scanning process focused on how we could help our students effectively learn the skill of self-assessment. We believed that this skill was necessary for our learners to fully appreciate and internalize the intention of the new core competencies.

Consequently, we decided to look more closely at the courses we were offering to see if the practice of self-assessment was embedded and if there were instructional practices within our courses that helped our students better understand how to self-assess.

Focusing: 2016-2017

During the school year of 2016-17, our focus was on embedding regular self-assessment and direct instruction to support the core competencies is a multi-year plan. To begin this journey, the staff wanted some baseline data. As a means of validating the implementation of this instructional strategy, all staff and some students were surveyed with the two questions below:

- 1) *How often have you used self-assessment in your classroom?* **Teacher**
- 2) *How often have you used self-assessment in your learning?* **Student**

- 3) *Does regular self-assessment improve your instruction?* **Teacher**
- 4) *Does regular self-assessment improve your instruction learning?* **Student**

Key Learnings:

The data from this survey was collated and discussed as a staff. Some of the anecdotal responses are included below but the overall findings affirmed the need to continue with self-assessment as an instruction tool.

Staff Responses:

- *Discussions with students were deeper after they reflected on their ability to communicate effectively. When prompted, students were able to see a connection between difficult times and their ineffective communication method*

- *Teaching the meaning of certain vocabulary was needed before the self-assessment tools were useful*

- **Access** - *In the beginning of my teaching career, I was heavily into students using self-assessment when looking at their class work, tests, and general engagement in the specific course. As a staff in my school in Richmond, BC, we agreed to have Student-led Parent interviews where the student took ownership of the meeting and discussed their successes and failures with their parent, with the teacher present. This was a struggle for many students as the parent often wanted to have a direct conversation with the teacher. At about year five of my teaching career, I used self-assessment daily, at the end of each class period, for students to rate their behavior/focus/work completion on a scale of 1 to 10 on what was called an "Attendance Wheel." This would then become part of their Work Habits mark that would accompany their term report card. I used this system until I was required to do my attendance within BCesis/MyEd, at which point I stopped using it as it became too time consuming. At this stage of my career, I have students assess themselves, and have done so for most years, at the end of each term. The quick rating system that I have previously used is then included with their term report card.*

- **Access** - *This is a difficult question that I have been thinking about over the last few weeks. As the nature of our program is substantially different from a "regular" classroom setting, I am not convinced that regular self-assessment for my students would be beneficial to my teaching. Students within our program can be hyper-critical of themselves, often failing to see their successes and growth on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. I engage students in reflective conversation at various points of the teaching/learning day, and these conversations often tease out bits of self-reflection/informal assessment from the student, but not to a regular, measureable level.*

My own self-assessment occurs on a daily basis, both in my debriefing sessions with my classroom colleagues, as well as my reflection on the days' events, how I handled situations, and

what I can improve upon for the following day. We have embarked on a difficult journey as a program, employing restorative practices and becoming trauma sensitive to our students, both in the setting and in our daily engagement with our students, most of whom are victims of traumatic experiences from early on in their existence. Within this “shift”, we are encountering lots of questions, discussion and frustrations, all of which do, I believe, help us become better educators.

- **DL** - I informally do quite a bit of self-assessment. I ask students the things they like about a certain assignment or how hard they have worked on something. I have a lot of conversations with students about how they feel about how they have handled different situations (so accessing their behavior). Speak to them about their goals and how/ what they have done to complete them. What they need to change or do to be able to meet their goals.
- Formally I use self-assessment as a way for students to assess their work which gets incorporated into their overall mark for their report card. I have a self-assessment report that I get students to use for certain courses such as weight training, planning and peer tutoring. This more formal self-assessment is done with each reporting period.
- DL - I would say that self-assessment improves my instruction as it helps me to see what the students have learned or not learned. It shows me the areas that I need to improve and build on. Their self-assessment helps me see the learning through their eyes.
- I constantly think back to the lessons I teach. I now have a semester 9 math class and having taught two linear ones this year, I am already changing things and trying to make improvements on how I present the material. It does improve my instruction!
- I think this can be improved on. I like the idea of a sliding scale, not just a check mark, but something the kids can highlight or color with maybe a one and a ten and they mark where they feel they are? Just my two cents
- **DL** - I have this one semester math 9 class that is quite bright, they just get things quicker than my other 9's and even more than some of my grade 10 students! So I adapted the lesson a bit to challenge them some more and they rose to the occasion! Also, from the conference I learned about that Kahoot game – I LOVE it! At the end of the class we did a Kahoot game to review what we learned today ;) I think every teacher probably does this daily, how could you not!?
- For my gifted program classes I informally assess at the end of the day how the classes went and make notes on what worked well and what to do differently next class. It would probably be a good idea to do this more formally on a monthly or quarterly basis.
- **DL and Access** - The students I spoke to said that they use self-assessment infrequently and it is usually focused on a specific project. Note: my grade 8 math course has a self-assessment piece for each of the three projects they work on.
- Yes, regular self-assessment improves my instruction. It helps me to discard or fix what is not working and to build on what is.
- The students I spoke to felt that the self-assessment they did helped them to focus on identifying what they did well and what they need to improve upon. Usually the self-assessment was project specific, so they felt it didn't improve their overall learning.
- I think I use self-assessment constantly. I don't think I have ever done a project in the same way, year to year. Especially the longer I am teaching, the more I change things. I am always saying to myself, what would I want for my own child, in this class?

- **DL and Classroom** - *Having a mentor this year is excellent, because I think we self-assess even more when we are watching ourselves through someone else's eyes.*
- *I have reflected a lot this year on the dance between classroom management vs. opportunities to speak French. They have to be speaking the language and this means that letting go of order is part of that. It is now organized order that becomes more important. A top student in grade 12 recently said to me that French 9 with me was the only immersion class where he actually spoke the most French, over the years. That was validating.*
- *I asked a student, who said, virtually never has he used self evaluation. This is a top grade 10 student. I have them performing skits next week. I am going to have them write what they would assign themselves, at the bottom, with the rubric, because I really have done so little of it, in my teaching. I am interested to see how they evaluate.*
- *Regular self-assessment improves teaching. I don't think I know a single teacher who doesn't do it. It's a huge part of what we do. I don't think anyone lazily uses the same lessons/sheets/projects from year to year, without reflection.*
- *In this case "classroom" would be mostly the online course environment. In some courses (like Comm 11 and 12 it is integrated into each unit) In my English 8 course students are required to assess their writing to make revisions. Indirectly and informally students (whether it is formally identified or not) are constantly having to self-assess) as there is not the immediate feedback from the teacher.*
- *Obviously yes if there is time and priority made to take self-assessment create actions plans to improve on strategies and course delivery and content.*

Developing a Hunch:

The team at ConnectEd is a group of professionals who have taught in their roles for many years. As a group we met to discuss our clientele and how we could teach and assess the core competencies effectively considering the different contexts and the implementation of the renewed curriculum.

More specifically, each group discussed which competencies match with certain courses better and how to successfully assess and teach the competencies? As a result, a common theme of self-assessment was agreed upon but the specific competency, vocabulary, and placement in instruction has varied.

Inquiry Question:

Will focusing on self-assessment practices help improve student success?

New Learning:

The core competencies along with literacy and numeracy foundations and essential content and concepts are at the centre of the redesign of curriculum and assessment. Core competencies are sets of intellectual, personal, and social and emotional proficiencies that all students need to develop in order to engage in deep learning and life-long learning.

The links below continue to be resources that guide our staff conversations and focus.

<https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/competencies>

<https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/assessment>

In addition, staff reflected on the "why" student self-assessment should be embedded in practice. In general, staff agreed that training students to evaluate their own work for the purpose of improving it is

key to them understanding their own learning. They also agreed that for students to become capable evaluators of their work, students must have

- An understanding of the vocabulary
- the opportunity to help create the self-assessment tool
- an opportunity to dialogue around their responses (deeper learning)

These findings align with the work of Wiggins, Stiggins, Paris, and Ayres as they states that student self-assessment that is effective also includes *reflective activities in which students are prompted to consider the strengths and weaknesses of their work, make plans for improvement, or integrate the assignment with previous learning* (Paris & Ayres, 1994; Stiggins, 1997; Wiggins, 1998).

Taking Action:

The implementation of the renewed curriculum is still in it's infancy in the Province of British Columbia. Regardless, it has already created a paradigm shift in our learning communities.

In the context of ConnectEd, the collaborative focus on self-assessment as a means of teaching and assessing the competencies is evolving. The team has agreed to embed this instructional tool into their daily practice and to use self-assessment rubrics as a means of reporting to parents.

Best Practice - Connection to the 7 Principles of Learning: **(How do each of these principles align with your plan?)**

1. **Learners at the centre**
2. **Social nature of learning**
3. **Emotions are integral to learning**
4. **Recognizing individual differences**
5. **Stretching all students**
6. **Assessment for learning**
7. **Building horizontal connections**

This school growth plan aligns well with the 7 Principles of Learning. Through the framework of the Spirals of Inquiry, the team at ConnectEd has implemented a school wide instructional strategy of rubric based self-assessment to teach the Core Competencies.

This tool and focus ensures that students are at the centre of their learning while recognizing and articulating their own abilities and areas of development. Students are engaged in regular metacognitive reflection and asked to communicate their thoughts via a rubric and then a discussion with a peer, their teacher, or their guardian.

Teacher focus to accomplish goals:

- 1) Embedding self-assessment language and rubrics into student lessons and units throughout the year.
- 2) Reviewing and teaching language and vocabulary associated with Self-Assessment tools.
- 3) Incorporating self-assessment tools to teach students to reflect on their own growth in the core competency areas of communication, critical and creative thinking, and personal and social responsibility.

Checking:

As a bi-product of this activity, many of the students in District Alternate have also expressed their emotions around their own learning abilities and why they feel the way they do. The emotional connection has deepened their relationship with their teachers and helped them grow as learners.

District Alternate (Access)

Trusting relationships and the willingness to reflect on their learning are two key factors that are necessary for students to effectively self-assess. The nature of Junior and Senior Alternate lends itself to being successful for most students with these factors in mind. The smaller setting and class sizes in combination with flexible scheduling and course work help students find a learning plan that is conducive to their needs.

In addition to school staff, the learning community collaborates with a variety of external agencies including MCFD, CYMH, PDCRS, Interior Health, etc. as a means of creating a holistic plan of student support. These relationships and partnerships are critical and valued.

Distributed Learning (Full-time, Home Learners, Cross Enrolled, Continuing Education)

In this learning format most student/teacher interactions are online. This allows for students to access and complete their coursework at their convenience. As a result, most communication between the teacher and student is direct and intentional and can be purposefully guided by the teacher. The addition of self-assessment can enrich any dialogue and help the student move more towards deeper learning rather than simple task completion.

The format of Distributed Learning is highly successful for self-directed students or students with active adult support. It allows individuals to flex their schedules if they are involved in other activities that require a varied calendar such as arts programs, or some athletic programs. It is also conducive to students who may be struggling with face to face interactions or have other challenges preventing them from attending a regular school.

In the 2017/2018 school year we will continue with this journey together. Each staff member will add another competency to their courses and our collaboration sessions will continue with this focus in mind.

Scanning in 2017-18:

From our 2016-17 spiral process, as a staff, we felt we had a good plan in place for continuing to implement self-assessment practices; however our hunch was we needed to return to the scanning phase as changing our self-assessment practices may not yield the degree of improvement to student success that we wanted.

As a result, we decided to return to the scanning phase (i.e. trying to understand "who are our learners" and "how we can best meet their unique needs"). Staff members were feeling that our students thought they suck as learners due to past experiences they have had with the school system, ultimately contributing to their attendance issues. We wondered, therefore if focusing on improving attendance would help through a strength based approach.

As a whole staff, we decided to **interview 3 different students** from each of our various schools (HLP, DL, CE, and ACCESS), as well we emailed out an electronic survey to all DL students, to find out more about "who our learners are?" We also engaged in student conversations as often as possible when we noticed student successes and failures, questioning the root for both the failure and/or success.

In our October Staff Meeting, we reviewed student responses to 4 questions.

- Can you name two people involved in your education who believe you will be a success in life?

- Tell me about a time when you felt you were really successful in your learning (in or out of school). What was it about that experience that helped you to feel successful?
- What have you done that has helped you be successful? What has been a challenge?
- What are the steps you can take to improve as a learner?

Most responses focused on these categories: Adult connections, mindset, hopelessness, self-sabotage, attendance, trauma, basic needs, substance abuse, and anxiety.

Consequently, our plan was to survey students – what would help you attend more? Most of this survey process was informal through student conversations.

In our November Staff Meeting, we followed up with staff from their interviews with students regarding attendance. Is there anything that would motivate, help, and encourage better attendance? The answers were very non-committal to “I don’t know”, “you already do things to get me here.”

As a staff we discussed the following types of questions. How do you know if a student is engaged? Connected to school? With Access and DL students it is the little things such as sharing a story, and/or asking for help. It is a spectrum of improvement. It is all about the relationships. These students have not had success and are careful to open up and trust. They are also managing other factors. In some cases, we are depending on parents who struggle themselves. Our conversation and plan of action then shifted to focusing on Growth Mindset. Our team agreed to share ideas and to open the conversations/lessons with their students in this focus area. DL may choose to focus in on two kids as an example.

Focusing: What changes can we make to help improve the growth mindset of our students? This question led us to question what our own growth mindsets were as a staff.

In our December Staff Meeting, staff watched the following video: <http://trainugly.com/mindset/> and discussed the impact of mindset on staff climate and the impact of our own mindset on our students. Staff completed a growth mindset self-assessment (see attached) and discussed how we did on the assessment and how in some cases it varied from our perception of ourselves. This led to a discussion about the connection between the possible fixed mindsets of our students and how this fit nicely with the competencies and would likely have a greater impact on student success than just focusing on self-assessment practices.

Developing a hunch about the focus-

Challenges:

Some students who are enrolled in a distributed learning program or alternate education program have preconceived views of themselves and their learning abilities. In many cases this view is negative due to the turbulent educational journey they have experienced prior to enrolling with ConnectEd. As well, many students are unaware of how to articulate their learning from a perspective of “where am I” and “what do I need to do to be successful.” This is not always the case as ConnectEd does service high achievers but prior experience with academic self-assessment is still uncommon and requires direct instruction.

Another significant challenge associated with online learning is the need for students to be self-motivated and technically competent. Students who struggle with time management, reading online, or using a web based learning software rarely complete courses without additional adult support.

In many cases, without support their fixed mindsets really get in the way of academic success and course completion. As a result, we felt that focusing on improving their growth mindset, and essentially improving their resiliency as students, would positively impact their success both in school and in life.

Inquiry Question:

Will the intentional addition of structured Growth Mindset lessons and a common language help the students at ConnectEd improve academically?

New Learning:

Based on Carol Dweck's work on Growth Mindset we did the following:

- Growth Mindset conversations and new learning at every staff meeting (articles/videos)
- Growth Mindset Monday's – Staff shared weekly mindset resources/videos to use with their students. This list and it's success was revisited at every staff meeting.
- Trauma through the lens of growth mindset became a key focus of learning and conversation. This was a focus at our April Staff Meeting.

Taking Action:

- HLP Club Class weekly Growth Mindset lesson
- Moodle Student Lounge conversations/discussions about Growth Mindset
- Focus on transition practices when students return to bricks and mortar
- Outdoor learning experiences when possible
- Use Growth Mindset language during intake process; help students see joining our program as a positive opportunity for change
- A focused effort by staff to embed mindset language into their everyday interactions/conversations with students

Checking:

A variety of data sources will be used to reflect on the impact of this plan.

The sources will include:

- student activation numbers in DL Course
- course completion rates
- student and teacher anecdotal responses
- feedback from parents
- student grades
- staff collaboration culture (administrator assessment)
- May Staff Meeting primary question is: "How do we know this is having a positive impact?"

Communication Strategies:

Parent engagement in the context of ConnectEd varies due to the nature of each program. The staff discussed *when* and *how* this inquiry and the results would be communicated to parents.

HLP – Parent Advisory meeting and a message relayed via Fresh Grade

DL – Term Report Card comment (Inquiry and specific student example)

Access – Specific rubrics used with the intention of sending them home with report cards. Students are aware when these self-assessments happen that they are specifically for report cards and parents.

Next Steps:

The team at ConnectEd firmly believes that we are a key support option for our entire community and that student success requires educators to think creatively when it comes to learning options. Moving into next year, this team plans to continue the focus of Growth Mindset and Self Assessment of the competencies but to move our learning more toward student voice as a means of encouraging our students to own their learning and to find their identity as members of our community.