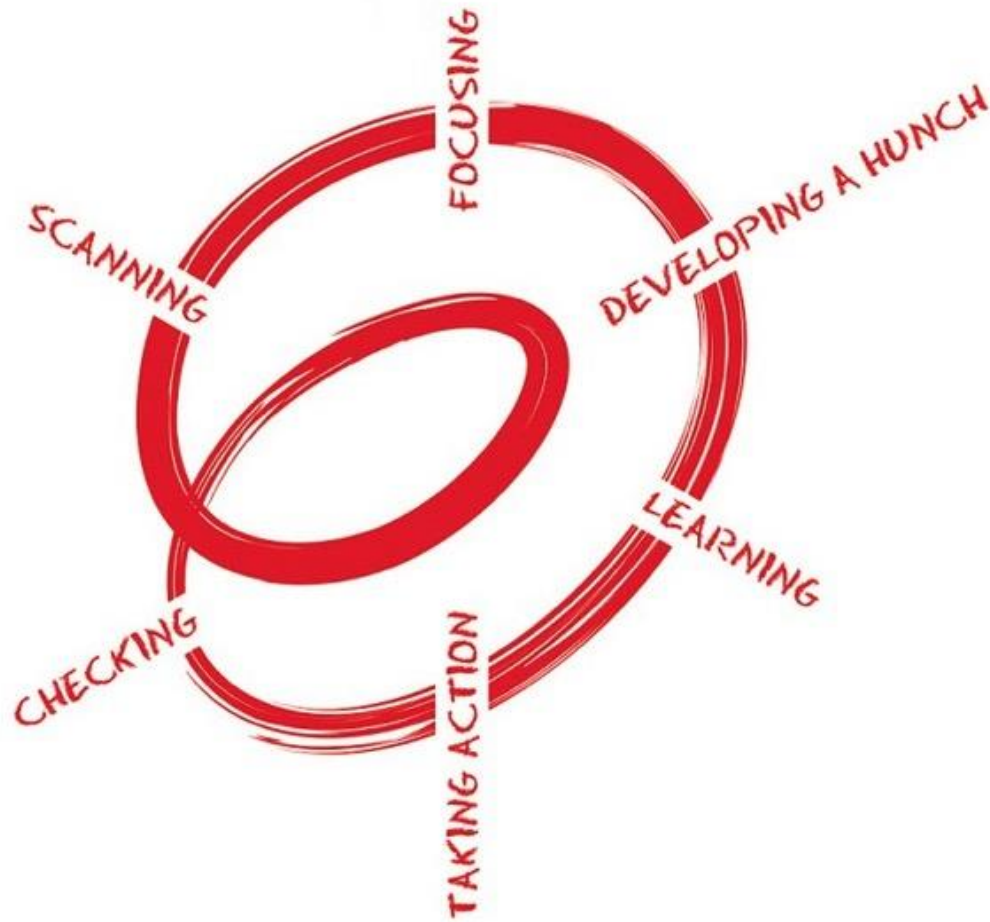




School District No. 67 (Okanagan Skaha) School Growth Plan



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

Draft Plan developed by:



School: Naramata Elementary

Naramata School Context:

Naramata Elementary School is a small community school situated in the village of Naramata along the eastern shore of Okanagan Lake, about 15 kilometres north of Penticton. With a student population of 95, Naramata School presently employs one administrator, one administrative assistant, eight teaching staff, and one CEA.

Although some of our parents work nearby in the fruit or wine industry, most of our parents work in nearby Penticton. Naramata, geographically, remains a distinct and unique community, with the school frequently being the focal point for the community.

Our school community strives to maintain a safe, positive learning environment based on mutual respect and trust. It is a place where students feel a strong sense of belonging and are encouraged to develop and grow socially, emotionally, and academically. Our students achieve because they:

- feel included and appreciated by peers and teachers,
- are respected for their different abilities, cultures, gender, interests and dreams,
- are actively involved in their own learning,
- have positive expectations from others that they will succeed.

We are also very proud of the strong connections between the school and the Naramata community and we often reflect on the statement that, "***It takes a village to raise a child.***" With this shared partnership between our students, staff, parents, and the community, the students of Naramata School are the ones who reap the benefits. The participation of all partners is critical to the operation of Naramata School and ultimately to the success of each of our students.

Inquiry Questions:

At Naramata, we have a small but dedicated staff, and everyone is very involved in the exploration of ways to further student learning, engagement, and success. This is the second year at Naramata for the administrator and over half the teaching staff, and we continue to look to and honour the work that has occurred over the last few years, and see the difference that initiatives such as an outdoor education philosophy, student self-assessment, and personalized learning have made to student learning. We began this year by meeting together and mindfully sharing what our collective vision is for our school, and what is '*Positive and*

Possible by 2020*. Our inquiry questions were re-confirmed, but we also agreed that it was important to shift our focus and thinking, so that our questions more accurately reflected growth in the core competencies. After careful consideration and collaboration with inquiry facilitators Judy Halbert, Linda Kaser, and Judith King, we realized that our original questions had evolved, leading to the following:

By implementing specific school-wide strategies which focus on children's social-emotional learning and the development of a growth mindset, what differences will we notice in student learning?

And,

If we broaden our scope of multi-age/multi-generational activities to include more outdoor opportunities and civic learning experiences within the larger community, what difference(s) will we observe with regards to student well-being, our school community, and beyond to the surrounding village?

- ***Specifically, will our children begin to shift their thinking from that of privilege to service, demonstrating gratitude to the village community through their actions?***

Our goal as a staff continues to be to create an environment that is inclusive, nurturing, affirming, and inspiring for every student in our school, and embeds the core competencies of the educational curriculum.

Emotional and Social Learning Student Successes and Challenges:

One of the observations heard quite often when visitors come into our school, is that it has a 'family feel' that is evident amongst the students, staff, and families. Much of this can be attributed to its small size, but as well, the staff has developed this environment by having children work in buddies (older students with younger students) at least once a week in different 'family pods' throughout the school. As well, DPA (Daily Physical Activity) is done school-wide three times a week, often with school buddies as partners, and (always) out in the village. This has led to students getting to know each other in less superficial and more meaningful ways, and as a result, children can be observed playing in multi-age groupings outside, rather than just with students of a similar age or grade.

The work that staff focused on in the past few years was initiated to support and strengthen the social and emotional learning of students. However, as was reported in the school growth plan in 2016, "*Some new students find it challenging to make connections with such a well-established and small school community. At times, student struggle with welcoming new students to our school.*" Staff also identified that in our small population, children with behavioural or emotional challenges are often singled out, or identified as the instigators of negative behavior on the playground and in classroom.

**See attached document 'Positive and Possible by 2020*

Academic Successes and Challenges:

The majority of students at Naramata Elementary are meeting grade level expectations in the academic areas of reading, writing, and numeracy. Home-school communication contributes a great deal to this success, as most parents are committed to supporting the work done at school. However, there is a small population of students who are reading and writing at well below grade level, and, even at an early age, appear to have 'given up' and therefore exert little if any effort on their schoolwork. As well, teachers have identified a small group of students who are academically successful, but also put in minimal effort and do not appear engaged in their learning. This prompted our focus on growth mindset, and we have begun to see a shift in student thinking, from 'I can't', to 'I can't... yet.'

Focusing:

We believe that by focusing our attention on the social and emotional learning component of our students, this will result in student success in all areas of life-long learning. Last year we introduced growth mindset to our students through whole school lessons, every day practice, and classroom affirmation activities. We are also continuing to use MindUp practices to help children deal with their emotions that may be blocking their learning. We begin our day with 'belly breathing' led by the administrator or a senior student over the morning announcements. Many of our assemblies begin with this practice as well, and we continually encourage students to use this practice to calm their minds when they are feeling anxious, angry, or overly excited.

An overriding focus on outdoor learning is the 'umbrella' over our practices, based on the research which points to the importance of connecting children (truly all people) with the land. As well, we hope to expand the learning opportunities both physically and socially, by providing greater opportunity for multi-age as well as multi-generational partnering. Working, learning, and playing outside has taken a greater focus this year, and we have had several special days which celebrate the outdoors (for example, Winter wonder day, during which we stayed outside all day, only coming in for recess and washroom breaks, village walks three times a week, spending the day at the beach or beside the creek in all seasons). One of the most exciting projects taking place is the collaboration of our kindergarten students and the grade 4/5 class, who have researched outdoor natural play spaces together, and are in the process of designing such a space to present to our local regional district. This project brings together our school focus on giving back to the community, outdoor learning, and honouring Indigenous practices and traditions in a synergistic, holistic way.

Evidence/Data to support:

Last year, informal interviews were undertaken with students, asking them:

-Can you name two people in this school who believe that you can be a success in life (or for young children, this question was adapted for understanding) and

*-Where are you going with your learning? What things are you being taught that help you learn?**

This year, we have made this process more intentional and directed. At our regular assemblies, we have been discussing 'gratitude'. What is it? What does it look like? We have focused on this virtue with students, and to demonstrate gratitude, together we wrote our winter concert/play around the idea of 'giving back' to the various groups and individuals who

do so much for our school. As well, this year we focused our grade five students' May Day speeches around the question, 'what makes a good Naramata citizen?' with the idea that the younger children will learn from these presentations.

Our questions have now shifted to:

- Can you tell us about something **you have learned** from those in the village community and
- Can you describe something **you have done** that has helped make Naramata a better place?

Key Learnings:

What we learned from our questions/interviews:

Last year, some of the surprising data that we gleaned was that a few children who had been at this school for many years, and appeared to be 'connected' in the village were not able to name two people who felt they would be successful and believed in them. We also found that a few students identified as 'vulnerable learners' in the early Fall of 2016, were also not able to name two supports, and because of this identification, we all made a conscious effort to connect with them. We also made this effort with the students new to our school, as staff had identified in 2015-16 that these children were feeling isolated and 'singled out'. For this cohort, we were happy to find that by the middle of the 2017-18 school year, there were not only able to name two adults, but often would provide more adult names, including support staff and volunteers in the building.

In response to our second question last year, "where are you going with your learning? What are you being taught that helps you learn?" the majority of students had difficulty providing a thoughtful answer. For many the focus was on content of learning, rather than process. This wasn't unexpected and provided impetus for our specific teaching of growth mindset practice to impact student learning.

Currently, we are continuing with interviewing all our students, focusing on the questions regarding what they have learned from the village community, and what they have done to make Naramata a better place. This narrative data is a work in progress, and we are excited to hear what the students have to say about this in the last few months of this school year.

Developing a Hunch: What is leading to this situation?

As was identified two years ago in the school plan, 'newcomers' to the school have a more significant struggle finding their place in this solidly established small school. Students and their families celebrate the unique nature of our school, and are quick to defend traditions and embedded practices because, 'that is how it always has been'. In this second year focusing on the 'newcomers' (including new teachers, administrator, and support staff) we continue to work towards establishing trust and confidence in each other. Parents and students (and even established and retired staff) are quite wary of changes or trying something new which hasn't been done in years' past. Our 'hunch' as a staff is based on this wariness, and how it may also be transferred to students who are new to the school and village. One child who moved here from the coast expressed it in this way: "I love this school, but I sometimes feel left out... my class gets mad when I don't know about something. Sometimes I don't even feel like asking about what we're doing, because I'm afraid of what they're going to say." (This same

child identified two adults who supported her, but neither was a staff member; one was a teacher from her past school). We are interested in looking deeper into the findings around behavioural and emotional issues stemming from students as well; as one teacher surmised, perhaps the behavior is undertaken to gain attention from established students and staff. One of our grade five students has experienced overwhelming anxiety about coming to school, and she has been at Naramata Elementary since kindergarten. There are three others who express their anxiousness in unexpected behavior. Our shift to service to the community is one which we are hoping will help these students learn that they have much to give others, and through this process will also stop focusing on their own needs, fears, and perceived inadequacies, and look outward to the school and village community. By asking them, 'what have you done that has made our school/Naramata a better place?'; we are hoping that this reflection will help them become more confident, resilient, and understanding of their own gifts.

New Professional Learning: (Summarize new areas for professional learning and how you will go about designing new learning for yourself and your staff that will impact your learners.)

At the beginning of the year, staff reflected on what had made significant differences in the school community, and we brainstormed for directions that staff felt intuitively would help students to reach their potential (building on the school plan developed in the previous year-see attached document). Our inquiry questions arose from this, nurtured by the district 'Spirals of Inquiry' sessions held with small groups from each school. With our questions in mind, our professional learning focused on:

MindUp:

In September, most of our classroom teachers began using MindUp strategies and lessons with their students (as they had implemented this in class in previous years), so it was agreed that this would continue, with an emphasis on simple steps such as belly breathing at our schoolwide assemblies.

Growth Mindset:

The study of growth mindset is new to all staff this year, and we began our journey with a collaborative book club, using Carol Dweck's book *Mindset: the New Psychology of Success* as a starting point for some, and Mary Cay Ricci's book *Mindsets in the Classroom* as a more practical guide for others. We felt we needed to develop our own understanding (and begin to practice growth mindset ourselves) before introducing to students. Since January, we have used our bi-weekly assemblies to introduce growth mindset, and teachers would then reinforce the message in class. In the spring, we are beginning to use growth mindset as our focus for school buddy time, when older students can 'coach' younger ones to use the language of growth mindset, and do an activity that reinforces the practice.

Personalized Learning and Inclusion:

This year, four of our staff attended the series of workshops on inclusion with Shelley Moore. Again, staff shared what they learned and implemented ideas/activities during school buddy time. One of our teachers led the school through a unit which focused on the core competency

of creative and critical thinking, which helped all the staff more comfortable and familiar with the transformed curriculum.

Outdoor learning:

Although this was a focus last year in our school, staff felt that they would like to look at a more organic way of internalizing outdoor learning, and so we began our village walks two or three times a week. This could be a nature walk looking for spawning fish or identifying indigenous plant species, or focusing on the fine arts with caroling around the neighbourhood or doing *plein air* with local artists. The possibilities are exciting and endless. We have invited local experts in the community to lead us on our journeys, but mostly we look to discover and question together. We also have three staff members who have delved into Reggio-based classrooms, and this has, in one of the teachers' words, "*truly transformed my own practice, and opened my eyes to the learning possibilities and potential when the classroom walls give way to the outside world.*"

Cultural Identity:

Our little school is steeped in tradition, and our students learn a great deal about the history of our community and school (which just celebrated its 100th year anniversary in 2014). This year, we wanted to continue to dig a little deeper, and learn more about the indigenous roots, and the myriad of cultures which make up our community. Although this was done at the school wide level, one of our primary teachers worked with our Aboriginal Education district team on an inquiry comparing and contrasting a traditional Aboriginal community with a present-day community. We are looking at ways to honour the past, but delve deeper into our history. Last year, we began by having an Elder come to speak about the unique hunting and sacred grounds surrounding Naramata, and this year expanded to identifying indigenous plants in the area, helping to identify and remove invasive plants, and have many field trips to explore water systems, trails, and heritage spots in our village.

Taking Action: What will you do differently?

This year, we have continued to build on what has been successful in the past (school buddies, outdoor learning start-ups, social and emotional learning activities) and incorporated these into our inquiry questions; for example, using our village walks as a time to work with a buddy on discovery, or having our older students mentor younger ones in growth mindset vision statements. We have moved deeper into our own practice of growth mindset, and model this learned behavior. We are providing more explicit teaching of self-assessment within our core competencies in the transformational curriculum. We are asking direct questions about students' place within our community, and ways to give back. By providing more opportunities for children to cultivate and learn their cultural identity and that of others within the community, we believe our students will develop stronger self-identity, confidence and empathy for others. We will continue to focus on gratitude and giving back to the larger community in order to follow our hunch that such actions will help develop deep-thinking, altruistic citizens of our global village.

Check: (Have we made enough of a difference? How do we know?)

This year, it has been exciting to witness the explosion of ideas and actions that have taken place amongst staff. It truly feels as if we have come together with a common vision, and that each person believes in this vision to the point that all are working independently, in small groups, and as a cohesive whole trying out new ideas and experiences with students. We may not see clear evidence that our efforts have made a difference with students – yet, but we are all passionate about the path we are on together.

Communication Strategies: (How will you communicate your inquiry and your results to the school community?)

During our schoolwide assemblies, we continue to discuss our school plan with the students; ie, what we are learning about, why we are learning it, how to move forward. Our schoolwide projects have focused on individual/group/school influences on the larger community. By having our students participate in ‘real-life’ projects (such as designing a natural play space for the community) and presenting these to an audience, they are learning that they can make a difference, have a voice, and can work towards the common good. Our narrative research, during which students are interviewed about their role in the community, will be shared with our PAC and at assemblies of which parents are a part.

Parental/Community Involvement: (How will you work together as a school community to do this work?)

Our school community works closely on all levels: with parents, students, staff and our village community. We have continued the tradition of involving Naramata citizens in many of our school activities, whether or not they have children at our school (ukulele lessons for seniors and students together, our cultural heritage potluck luncheon, a family dance, May Day activities, a community talent show, drumming lessons and community concert, Chefs in the Classroom, to name a few). By providing ‘real-life’ projects that are designed by students, and giving them a voice in community meetings, also help to strengthen partnerships within the various groups in Naramata.

Connection to the District Goals: (How does this plan connect to our district goals?)

Our plan and inquiry questions are directly connected to the district’s goals, as we feel our social/ emotional learning focus is integral to helping learners challenge themselves to reach their academic goals, understand their role in our changing society, and believe they can contribute as a global citizen. By exploring and embracing outdoor education, multi-age, multi-generational learning, and the essential value of gratitude and giving back, we are helping our students become world citizens and life-long learners.

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**

By focusing on growth mindsets, self-assessment within our transformed curriculum, children are naturally at the centre, and are encouraged to be a lead in their learning and assessment(1,6). In elementary school, we have long valued the importance of play-based learning, in environments which are safe, creative, and inspiring. This reflects the social nature of learning(2). We recognize that a focus on the social and emotional needs of children is essential in order to calm and open their minds and hearts to academic learning(3). Response through intervention leading to individualized learning is integral to our teaching practice, and valued through class reviews, school-based team meetings, and mentorship amongst students through buddy time, to name a few. (4, 5) Lastly, we believe our school plan supports not only the importance of building connections in growth of knowledge and attainment of deeper learning, but, perhaps more significantly, our inquiry and focus on building and strengthening relationships between students, families, staff and the larger village community will help develop mutual respect, learning, mentoring, and caring for all those within our school and beyond (7).

