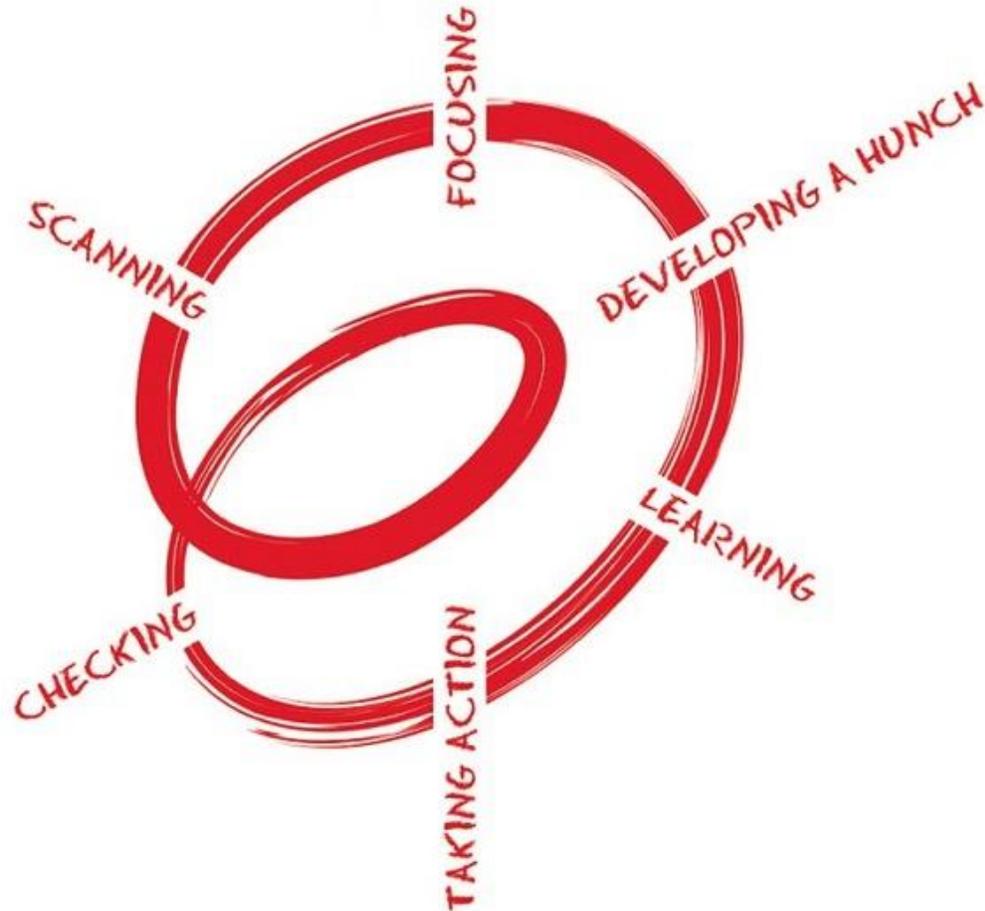# School District No. 67 (Okanagan Skaha)
Columbia Elementary - School Growth Plan

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

School: <u>Columbia Elementary</u>

School Context:

Columbia Elementary is located in a residential area east of the central area of Penticton. Currently there are 267 students enrolled from Kindergarten to Grade 5 in thirteen divisions. The school proudly provides a solid foundation in the core areas of the curriculum; as well as extracurricular opportunities that extend our children's learning including interschool athletic teams, a Music Glee Club, and opportunities for students at all levels to demonstrate and develop leadership skills. The Columbia staff is embracing opportunities to take learning outside of the classroom through offsite field trips and neighbourhood walks. Indigenous Ways and First People's Principles of Learning are incorporated into many areas of the curriculum.

Our school is fortunate to have a supportive Parent Advisory Council and parent community. PAC provides financial support to subsidize many extracurricular activities. This support helps to provide necessary transportation, resources and equipment to extend learning into alternate locations in and around our community. Through meaningful, hands-on educational experiences students are given an opportunity to engage in their curriculum and connect it to the world around them.

Inquiry Question:

Shifting from the Five Cs to Successful Learner Traits

**If we have a school-wide focus on using the Successful Learner Traits
to help students reflect on their progress (with Core Competencies)
will they be more connected to their learning?**

Our goal is to explore the use of Successful Learner Traits in the classroom in order to provide a common language to assist students to better reflect on the core competencies of Communication, Thinking and Personal and Social.

Focusing:

The original intention of the 5Cs was to teach and recognize traits of good citizens. In our work as educators, we wanted to adopt a common language that would help students reflect authentically on their Core Competencies and learning of the new curriculum. A focus on connectedness to learning was a natural progression from connecting to others, the focus of previous school goals.
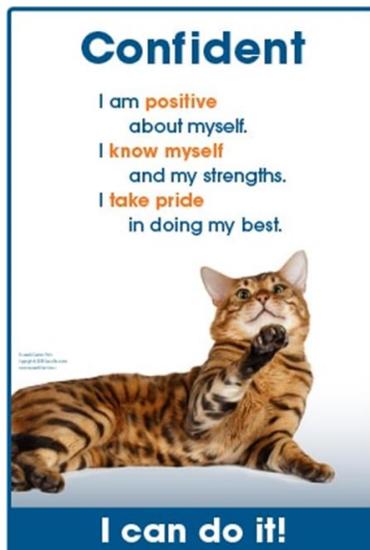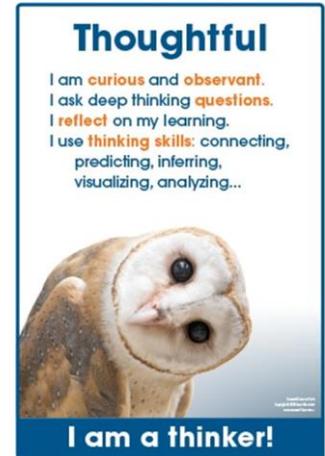

Developing a Hunch:

We believed that in order to have authentic student self-reflection and assessment students needed to be able to speak about their strengths and areas of challenge. Providing students, as young as Kindergarten, with new language they could use to talk about their learning was what we were yearning for.

A staff member had become aware of the Successful Learner Traits after speaking with a colleague at another school. The premise was shared and staff agreed to embark on a new learning journey together. We saw the Successful Learner Traits as a framework to explicitly teach and help students to understand how learning is not just about acquiring knowledge or mastering isolated skills, it is a process of setting-goals, working towards those goals and routinely reflecting on progress along the way.

We decided to approach Sue Bannister, the creator of the framework, to see if she would come and do a presentation/workshop with our teaching staff tailored specifically to our school. Involving everyone at the grass roots stage was important to us. If we were seeking a common language for our students it was crucial that everyone have the same background information and resources to get started.

New Professional Learning:

On the Curriculum Implementation Day in November 2018 we spent the day with Sue Bannister learning about the research behind the traits as well as exploring ways to begin to embed them in our current instructional practices. We created SLT Resource binders for staff including classroom teachers, Music Specialist, Teacher-Librarian, Counsellor and Administration. In anticipation of our in-service we ordered materials to support the implementation including sets of trait posters, desk plates for Primary students, bookmarks, stickers and key rings. These materials were expected to make the new learning visible to both staff and students as a reference and reminder to build them into everything we do. We also released teachers to meet in grade groups to share their experiences thus far; the successes, the challenges and where they believe they should go next.
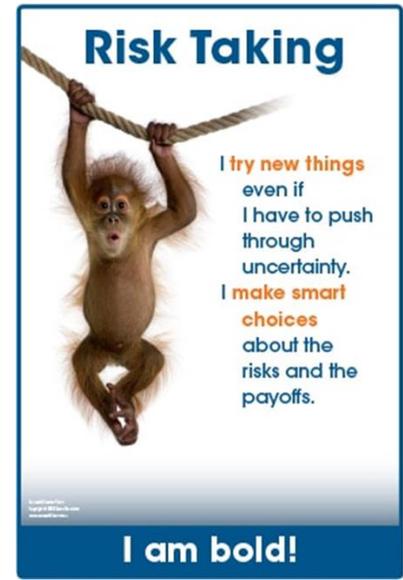
Taking Action: What will you do differently?

Staff began immediately to use the traits in their roles. Some ways they embedded them into their practice included:

- focusing on 6 of the 8 traits and launching each trait with a book or video
- guiding discussions and completing activities that related to each trait
- buddying with another same grade class to share stories and art activities
- throughout the activities had students self-reflect on how they thought they were showing that trait
- using the posters to remind students about the traits
- setting goals for each unit and reflecting on the traits that we used when learning new skills
- making connections to subject area lessons; specific lessons for a trait
- focusing on one trait per month, doing activities and reflections for each one we were working on
- using the language in everyday teaching practice
- trying to model the traits and have students notice and determine the traits
- having students "catch" each other modelling the traits and notice each other
- connecting to Growth Mindset teaching activities and incorporated into Zones
- providing positive reinforcement to students by mentioning the trait that I have observed the student using
- having a competency target "I can" and a SLT target "I am" built into most lessons
- listing targets on the board for one specific goal

- at least once a week, have students fill out a graph of one or two traits they used most that day and write a quick blurb about how they showed that trait for the day
- focusing on the traits when tasks are challenging and encourage them to "take a risk"
- follow-up activities such as filling a jar with "compassion hearts" and taking turns being leaders of the "Compassion Club"
- often stopping during an activity to point out a student who is exhibiting a trait
- purchasing and cataloguing books with connections to the traits
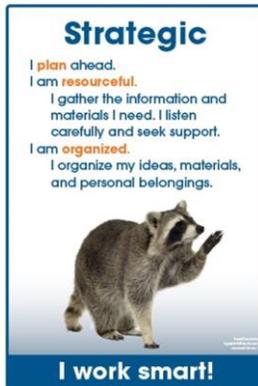
This has changed teacher practice by:

"SLT's have definitely changed the way I look at student self-reflection. Before it was almost a once a term event and now it is built into our daily practice and occurs at least once a week. The targets help guide what the students are learning and how they are learning the given task."

"It has made me more aware of the traits that students are exhibiting and made me explicitly teach each to them."

"It has changed because I am trying to have the students be more accountable for assessing themselves. After every activity/test I like to have them complete a self-assessment on their performance whether it is the thumbs up/thumbs down model or a written assessment on things they did well and things they could improve."

"I use the SLT language within the classroom (I like the consistency it has brought). It seems as if it is an accessible way to incorporate SEL in a way that students understand. I will be aiming to incorporate the SLT language into my report cards in June, as well as reporting on the SLT's instead of the 5 Cs."
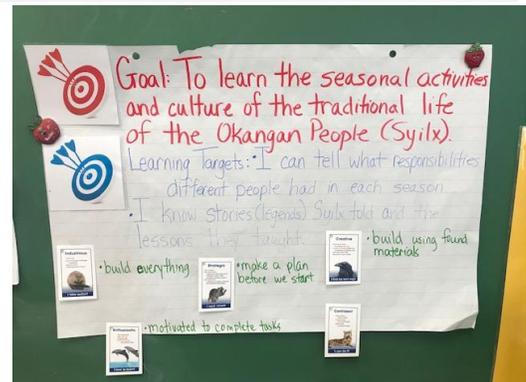
"My instruction hasn't changed a great deal. My assessment now usually consists of a student self-reflection on how the student used the SLTs in the activity. My reporting hasn't changed, as our reporting tool, MyEd, doesn't reflect or fit the SLTs very well."

Checking:

Observations – Strengths/Successes

From Student Interviews:
- students can name the traits by using the words not just the animals (not one student interviewed even mentioned the animals on the posters)
- students can see connections between traits when discussing them (e.g.: when you are being compassionate you might also be thoughtful too)

- students can recognize what trait they are strong in and connect with the most
- students can list what traits they use particularly in math and reading and on the playground

From Staff Reflections:
- students are beginning to point out examples in stories we read just for fun
- students have been very eager to use the SLT language in the classroom
- they get excited when they are able to use the traits in discussions or when they make connections in stories
- they have been much more relate-able to the students compared to the 5 Cs
- they like hearing adults identify the traits in their actions.
- when we talk about characters or being mindful, the traits always come up
- they are proud when positively reinforced. Big smiles! :)
- they feel proud of their accomplishments; I see it in their body language and quality of work
- they use the language themselves; I hear the students often using the SLT language in lessons and with peers
- they have become more self-aware of how they are identifying with each trait through their work and can mention when they are for example being "creative"

Observations – Stretches/Challenges

From Student Interviews:
- students were not able to describe what the SLT are without just naming the traits (perhaps this needs to be reinforced in the classroom by teachers)
- some students could list why we are using the SLT at Columbia but the majority couldn't (perhaps this again needs to be looked at the beginning of the year and reinforced within the classroom or whole school assembly)

Industrious

I **work hard.**
I **persist** through challenges or setbacks.
I stay **focussed.**
I make good use of time.

I take action!

From the Staff Reflections:
- some are still getting used to the new language and they have a harder time recognizing the traits that they are using. These ones need more support when setting goals and doing reflections.
- they have connected to some more than others; for example, compassion really seems to stand out for them and they point out examples of this frequently.
- some of the older students have mentioned that they are able to connect more with the 5 Cs as that as is the language they have learned and been using at Columbia since they were in Kindergarten.

Student Voice

We asked several students from various grade levels for some feedback in regards to the Successful Learner Traits. Here are some of their responses:

What are the Successful Learner Traits?
"Eight things that help you through school. They have a bit more detail than the 5Cs" - R, Grade 5
"Things to help people learn and connect with other people" - O, Grade 5

Why do we use Successful Learner Traits at Columbia?
"Makes everyone connect better" - D, Grade 5
"So people can see what traits they are using during different activities" - C, Grade 5
"They motivate you to work hard and be kind" - Z, Grade 5
"They help you with your learning" - M, Grade 2
"You can remember them more than the 5C's" - A, Grade 4

What Successful Learner Traits do you connect with?

"**Risk taking** because I never give up when things are frustrating for me" - S, Grade 1

"**Confidence** because I know myself, what I can do and what I need to work on" - G, Grade 4

"**Compassionate** because it is when you are really nice and how I want to be treated" - D, Grade 1

"**Risk taking**, not like doing crazy stuff, but trying new things" - A, Grade 4

"**Confidence** in math because I have to be confident in moving myself forward with the process of long division and multiplication" - L, Grade 5

"**Creative**, I like to change ideas and make them my own" - O, Grade 5

"**Thoughtful**, I don't wreck anyone's things" - O, Grade 1

"**Enthusiastic**, because I love to learn!" - N, Grade 1

"**Industrious** with my reading. I am always staying on task with my reading. I am not chatting to my friends and not yelling out my words I am just reading quietly in my head and staying in one spot" - S, Grade 1

Middle Years Development Instrument

The data obtained from the Middle Year's Development Instrument's (MDI) school report reveals 78% of Grade 4 students have a high academic self-concept. Only one student responded to having a low self-concept perception regarding how interested and confident they are in school. The fact that 20% lie in the medium range indicates that we still have students to focus on with regards to their perceptions of themselves in school.

ACADEMIC SELF CONCEPT

Children's beliefs about their academic ability, including their perceptions of themselves as students and how interested and confident they feel in school. e.g., "I am certain I can learn the skills taught in school this year."

		0% 25% 50% 75% 100%
High	78%	
Medium	20%	
Low	2%	
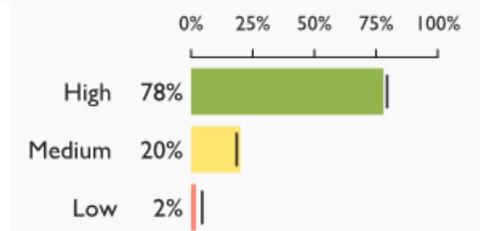
Our MDI results also revealed that a majority of Grade 4 students feel making friends, getting good grades and learning new things is very important. We would hope that through increased engagement and connectedness to their learning students would actively participate with new peers, meet with success and acquire new skills and confidence.

Percentage of children who feel it is **very important** to:

70% make friends	70% get good grades	75% learn new things
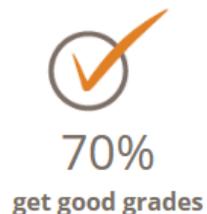
Next Steps:

While an early review of our data indicates that students do feel more connected to their learning, our next step will be to review all of the staff and student's reflections in order to plan for the next school year. Ownership over the school goal must come from the teachers who are working with students on their goals every day. A continued, collaborative approach to implementation and a progression to a school-wide approach are anticipated to be part of our second year working within the SLT framework. The traits have provided a platform for professional conversations and we are excited about what will come next!

Communication Strategies:

At the stage we are at our communication with our parent community is primarily through parent-teacher interviews, report cards, student-led conferences and the sharing of e-portfolios including "All About Me" in MyBlueprint and Freshgrade in several classrooms. Our Curriculum Implementation Teacher has worked with District workgroups and staff to embed technology into student learning, self-reflection and sharing.

Parental/Community Involvement:

We will formally share this Columbia Growth Plan with our parents at the June PAC meeting. We want them to understand that the Successful Learner Traits are the framework in all class activities for students to self-reflect on their learning. We will also review the Spiral of Inquiry model so that they understand the process we follow.

We will also share our MDI data which provides a snapshot of Grade 4 data about the thoughts, feelings and experiences at school and in the community. The results this year indicate that a number of students report things that may be concerning to parents. For example 44% report going to bed between 9-11pm, 15% eating as a family less than 2 times a week and 50% not participating in any team sport. Children report spending 2 or more hours on video or computer games (42%)

Connection to the District Goals:

The District's framework includes a system-wide focus on Literacy, Numeracy and School Completion. By focusing on the Core Competencies, a set of intellectual, personal and social and emotional proficiencies, we are helping students to understand their individual strengths and make self-reflection part of daily routines. We hope to play a role in having students walk the stage with purpose, dignity and choice.

By knowing themselves as learners we believe that they will be better able to contribute as individuals and members of their community.

Connection to the 7 Principles of Learning:

1. **Learners at the centre**
   - learning success looks different for individual students
   - focused planning for student-reflection and assessment benefits all learners
   - explicit teaching and routine practice of language empowers all students

2. **Social nature of learning**
   - multi-age groupings provide purposeful social interactions outside normal group of peers and classmates
   - working with others can provide high challenge/low risk
   - understanding and caring for oneself and others can be nurtured at any age
   - knowing that peers can be a resource is valuable to accept in the early years
   - staff collaboration and mentorship reinforces the responsibility for teaching belongs to everyone

3. **Emotions are integral to learning**
   - each individual's trust in their own abilities is directly related to their internal feelings
   - feelings of confidence and success will drive new behaviours
   - providing support throughout the learning process builds resiliency

4. **Recognizing individual differences**
   - activities are designed to allow different entry points and degrees of inclusion
   - student strengths showcased through the use of self-reflection and e-portfolios are unique to each child
   - each student can be working on individual goals related to learning and the traits

5. **Stretching all students**
   - honest reflection in order to set new goals acknowledges that learning something new can be challenging for everyone
   - self-reflection is personal and engages students to look inwards at themselves and their actions
   - recognizing their role in their own learning gives students a sense of ownership
   - maximizing student motivation by helping them see themselves in their learning
   - focusing on helping students to thrive unleashes potential and creativity

6. **Assessment for learning**
   - feedback (self, peer and adult) can have a profound influence on motivation and self-esteem of students
   - taking ownership over one's learning helps them see areas for improvement
   - increasing engagement through self-reflection is authentic

7. **Building horizontal connections**
   - sharing self-reflections with others will become more natural over time
   - common language, routines and expectations bring all students into school community