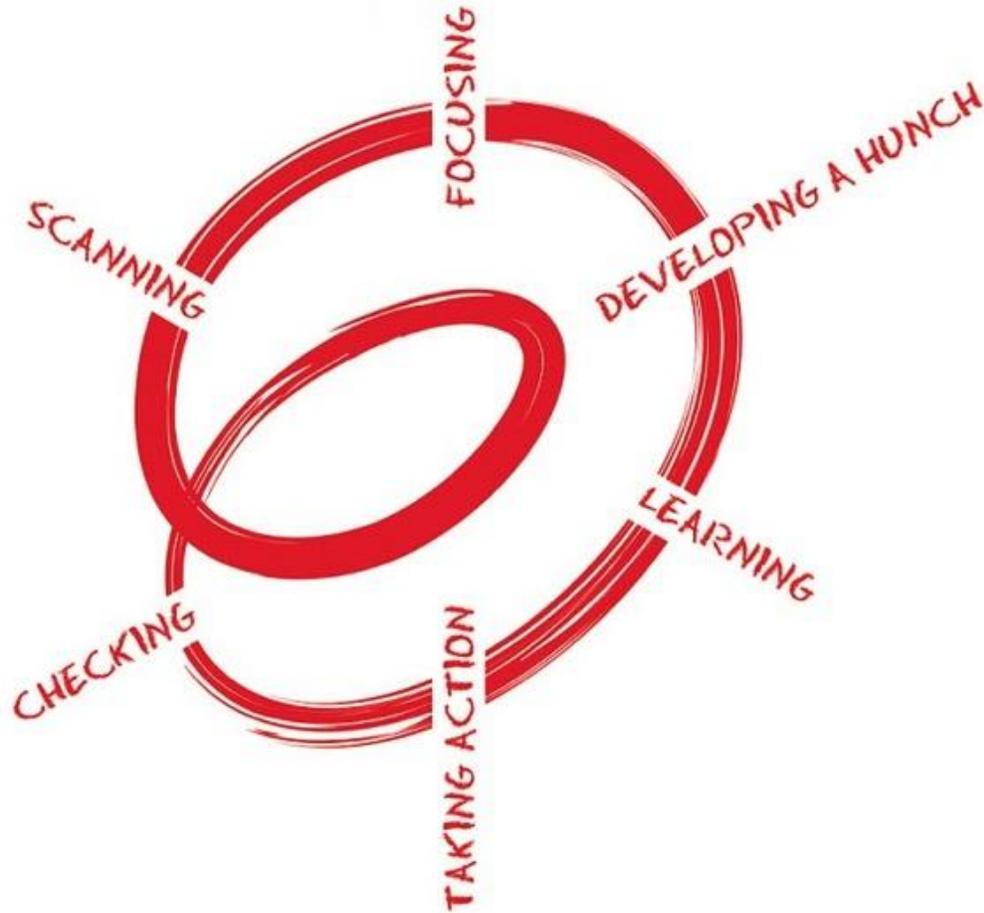**School District No. 67 (Okanagan Skaha)**
Queen's Park Elementary - School Growth Plan

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

School Context:

Queen's Park is a thriving school nestled in between Okanagan Lake and the community center. Over the last 8 years we have found great success in building a culture of respect, responsibility and leadership through our Leader In Me and 7 Habits of Happy Kids program based on the work done by the Franklin Covey institute. We work with many outside agencies to help support both our families and students and have greatly benefitted from our partnerships. We are extremely thankful to Meals on Wheels for their breakfast program which averages well over 50 students a day and we can't stress enough how crucial our $2.00 lunch program has been in helping students. Amazingly we service over 140 students a day in two separate sittings in this very necessary endeavor. We have a variety of thriving extra-curricular activities headlined by our choir which has over 60 students involved and has won numerous awards, accolades and opportunities to perform with professional musicians playing in Penticton. We very much appreciate the community and parental support we have to help with our Ice Hockey team and talent show, both of which are mainly supported through volunteers.

Inquiry Question: What do you think is driving your plan for student success?

The renewed curriculum along with the new role of the competencies are the driving forces behind our decision to investigate how best to incorporate the process of students learning and teachers pedagogy around the core and curricular competencies. As a staff we believe that if we can get to a place where students are capable of thoughtfully and authentically reflecting on their learning and who they are as a person, we will be deeply affecting their metacognition which is at the heart of deep and sustained learning as well as their overall sense of self. When we analyse our data it indicates that, for the most part, our students feel quite connected to the school and have strong relationships with both the teachers and their peers, feel good about themselves, and are having positive school experiences. As a staff, something we would like to continue to focus on is increasing our student's academic resiliency and belief in their ability to learn. Currently our data indicates that we have 81% of students having a strong academic self-concept but we would like to see that rate increase and we believe a focus on the renewed curriculum is an avenue towards that. As well, despite our students having a fairly strong sense of confidence in their learning, we continue to observe many students lacking a sense of resiliency when confronted with barriers, blocks of difficulties in their learning. Therefore, we believe that if we continue our work on the core competencies and turn our attention to the curricular competencies, we will make a direct positive impact on student self-concept and engagement in their academics which will in turn increase student achievement

and enjoyment. We believe this because the Core Competencies are designed with the idea of developing and promoting the overall sense of self for the student. We believe that as we get better at teaching the Curricular Competencies which focuses on the processes of learning as compared to subject content alone, students will engage in self-reflection which will demonstrate to the students that those barriers and blocks are truly a key part of the process of learning. We hope that by connecting the curricular and core competencies with student self-reflection, more students will see the success they have academically which in turn will help build or further a sense of resiliency, engagement and sense of self-worth.

Our goal(s); we will…

In the first half of the year, the staff continued to cement both the concepts of the core competencies and the language. Our focus with the core competencies was to find authentic experiences for the students to reflect which would then lead to authentic student voice in their reflections. Observationally, we are often pleased with the depth and level of authenticity of student reflection and voice in their day to day experiences but unfortunately, these experiences are difficult to capture in the moment. We continue to work on finding best ways to have students record their core competency reflections in an authentic voice for parent communication. As the year progressed, our focus shifted towards having student core competency reflections become an outcome of the work we do with our general learning in all subjects. What we realized was that, as a staff, we have not embraced the curricular competencies and often continued to have subject content be the driver of lessons. As we drilled down to see why this was the case, we determined that most teachers naturally incorporate many of the curricular competencies skills but find them difficult to directly teach and more importantly, assess, because of the nature of the curricular competency language. Our most recent goal is to work with the curricular competency processes so that we can define the language for students and teachers while establishing baseline expectations for each grade. The curricular competency language is very similar and consistent throughout the K-5 curriculum which is fantastic for developing student understanding and building depth in those skills. The difficulty lies in determining what is actually expected at each grade level and even further, how to break down the skill development within the grade. Our immediate goals for the rest of the current year and going into next year will revolve around setting a continuum from K-5 and then working on setting expectations within each grade. A large part of this process will involve looking at and developing our assessment practices with reference to a focus on competencies as opposed to content.

Scanning: (What do you know about your students – their successes and challenges - what's going on for them)?

Successes

For the most part, we have established a strong foundation of student and teacher understanding, use, and authentic reflection of the core competencies. Many teachers report that they are incorporating the core competency language more seamlessly and authentically in their daily lessons and interactions. It continues to be something that will require specific

effort and direct focus before we get to the point where all our teachers are naturally embedding the language in all aspects of school life. At this point, our students know the language of the core competencies and half way through the year the majority could explain what the three core competencies were. When prompted or asked most of our students are able to reflect on how they use the core competencies at school especially when referencing a directed core competency activity. At any point in a lesson, most teachers could ask students to explain how they were using a core competency and most students would be able to respond in some way. Collectively, we still feel that those "on the spot" reflections are still mostly surface and do not target the curricular competency skills we would ideally like them to reflect on. This is indicative by the fact that, on their own, most students are not able to break down the core competencies into the sub headings or individual attributes.

Challenges

Our next step is learning how to incorporate the curricular competencies including assessment and reflection. From there, we expect that students will then transition to reflecting on the core competencies as a direct result of the activities in the curricular competencies. The biggest immediate barrier to this is the shift in having the curricular competencies be the focus of the lesson as opposed to a byproduct. In traditional teaching, content is the driver of the lesson and curricular competency attributes were seen as a pleasant byproduct of learning the content. With the renewed curriculum and the need for students to become 21st Century learners, the curricular competency skills have become the goal of learning and the content is the vehicle to get there. Given this, as a staff when we examined the curricular competency language and skills we realized that most of the language is verb based and requiring higher order thinking which is difficult to both make tangible for students and even harder to assess. Words like, "demonstrate, consider, experience and interpret, differentiate, construct narratives, make ethical judgments" are very vague especially when we are used to tangible concreteness of content. We know that the curricular competency skills are what students need to be successful in the future, but having said that, switching our pedagogy to a curricular competency focus is proving to be quite difficult. We also know or at least expect that, as we become better at teaching and assessing the curricular competencies, student reflections of the core competencies will become a direct result of what they are learning in the curricular competencies.

Focusing: (Identify the most important work you can do to improve the success of your students. On which key areas of learning will you focus)?

Evidence/Data to support:

General School Climate and Practices

When we analyze our MDI (Middle Years Development Instrument) we see a number of very encouraging trends. We do recognize that the MDI is a single tool and only measures Grade 4 students but as a staff we feel it is indicative of our school as a whole and the results would be reflective of the students at each grade level. The most encouraging aspect of the report is the overall well-being index. This index measures a student's sense of optimism, happiness, self-

esteem, general health and an absence of sadness. Unfortunately, we still have 21% of students registering in the low range. The highlights within the numbers is that we have 81% of students with a high sense of self-esteem, 77% of students with a high sense of happiness, and 85% of students with a high sense of empathy. We are also pleased to note that 88% of our students feel they have 2 or more important adults in the school that they feel connected to. We are particularly pleased with this because we have not had this as an actual focus, it is more a product of our general daily routines. We also have 94% of our students feeling their peer relationships are an asset. Overall these numbers confirm what we believe as a staff which is that our 7 Habits Character education program and the work we have already done with the core competencies has made a lasting impact on our students. This is especially encouraging since we have taken the spotlight off of our 7 Habits program and have switched to a greater focus on the Core Competencies. The downside to the MDI data is that we continue to have individual students who have significant struggles and are not feeling successful at school.

Core Competency Data
We surveyed 6 students (2 Stronger, 2 Average, 2 struggling) from each class and asked them 6 questions determining if they could name Core Competencies, explain why they were important, which they were best at and how they could improve in the competencies. Our results were positive and what we expected for the most part. In classes where teachers made it a point to focus on the Core Competencies at least once a week, almost all students could respond confidently and comprehensively with examples and explanations on most if not all the competencies. As to be expected, the more teachers taught the better the students were at engaging in their explanations and the less teachers engaged in Core Competency work, the less they were able to seamlessly discuss the competencies.

Key Learnings:

Through our student surveys there were a number of key learnings we did find interesting:

1. Almost all students did not see the Core Competencies as an aspect of their everyday learning but more as a result of doing specific activities which were specifically targeted as a way of learning and cultivating the Core Competency concepts and language. The students were authentically reflecting on their Core Competencies in the activity, however, most students didn't make the connection to their general learning and only a small percentage transferred the skills outside of school life. Students did not see the Core Competencies as applying to all aspects of life.
2. We believe one of the barriers for students connecting the Core Competencies to their learning could have a foundation in the way and amount of times teachers have students simply reflect on their learning all day long. The Core Competencies are really about reflection so part of the shift in pedagogy is shifting to include a more reflective approach to teaching. Less leading and more asking kids to lead themselves.
3. The problem with "doing CC activities" is that it becomes "just another thing" and can be forgotten or not taught because the days are being filled with subjects.
4. We need to move away from teaching Core Competencies as a standalone idea or through specific competency based activities and instead incorporate curricular competencies to our everyday teaching.

5. We need to understand how to teach and how to assess the curricular competencies so we can use this as a tool to increase student engagement, metacognition and their ability to reflect. We want students to reflect on their use of the competencies, both core and curricular, in their daily lives as well as a tool for their academic learning.

Developing a Hunch: What is leading to this situation?

Our understanding of the core competencies has come to a point where teachers and students can articulate on, and reflect in an appropriate and authentic manner without being prompted when the activity has a focus on the core competencies. What we are not seeing is students using their ability to reflect on and understanding of the core competencies as a learning tool for their social interactions or academic learning.

We have now organically moved on to what we see as the next step, incorporating and assessing the curricular competencies in our daily practice in hopes that it will support student's better usage of the competencies in different areas. In order for this to happen, as a staff, we need to have a better understanding of the curricular competencies. Through discussions with teachers we have realized the challenge with the curricular competencies is that we struggle in the shift from a content to competency focus, specifically referencing our ability to design, teach and assess the curricular competencies.

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).

Through staff meetings we have recognized that the greatest difficulty with implementing the curricular competencies is that all the curricular competencies are "processes" that are steeped in open ended verbs. These are challenging because there isn't any actual criteria or grade level expectations for the curricular competencies. Further, despite K-5 curricular competency language being very similar in each grade, there isn't a provincial scope and sequence to help set grade level expectations. As a school, our next step will involve breaking down each of the processes, creating a scope and sequence and then determining the criteria for each grade level. We are also struggling with understanding and deciphering if all of the specific curricular competencies need to be assessed. We think that some may blend together and not require individual assessment. One of the key learnings we have from our student's surveys and classroom observations is that the way with which teachers and classes reflect in general is a factor in how the core competencies are embedded. Since we know that good formative assessment involves thoughtfully placed reflection, we will be integrating professional development around formative assessment, especially in the area of assessing processes.

Taking Action: What will you do differently?

The key to deepening core and curricular competency understanding and adoption is simply the amount of time spent on them. As teachers learn to embed competency reflection and curricular competency design and assessment into subject area lessons, student's use, authentic voice and overall adoption of the skills will increase. The steps needed to build toward that can happen in a number of ways.

1. Collaboration
   - Teachers found that when they collaborated with other classes, both the frequency and impact of the lessons increased.
   - Buddy classes are a great way of building the concepts as the older students help to teach the younger students, which reinforces the older student language, while the younger students are more engaged which deepens their learning.
   - As collaboration evolves, we expect teachers will look to reflect and discuss on the curricular processes instead of just using standalone competency lessons.
2. Professional Development
   - Work on professional development in the area of formative assessment.
   - As our understanding of formative assessment increases in the area of assessing processes, our implementation of the curricular competencies as the driving force of lessons will increase. Inversely, our dependency on content based lessons and assessment will decrease.

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

As we move forward this will be a yearlong process and we will become more comfortable assessing higher level thinking and determining how to assess skills and process as opposed to just the content. We will continue to interview teachers and students to see if our efforts are changing practices.

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

From conceptual to practical

The difficulty with communicating our goals to the community is that because the revised curriculum and concept of the core and curricular competencies are so new and so very different from the ways that previous generations have been taught, it is difficult to get a wide enough audience with enough time to explain what core and curricular competencies are. As such, the process will be slow and more importantly needs to be simple and clear for parents to buy in and fully understand. As the District moves to using the "All About Me" program for communicating student reflections with the core competencies, we will also look to use that tool as a medium to explain our message. As the year progresses, we will likely use student

led conferences, PAC meetings, newsletters, open houses and general teacher meetings as avenues to integrate our parent community.

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

- See above.

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

The core competencies are a direct part of the District goals.

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

1. **Learners at the centre**
   - Self-reflection is central to this both in their general cognition and growth
   - The curricular competencies are process based which means more active exploration
   - Reflection leads to self-regulation
2. **Social nature of learning**
   - Both core and curricular competencies are steeped in social learning
3. **Emotions are integral to learning**
   - The social nature of learning along with strength based learning will lead to higher levels of positive emotions
4. **Recognizing individual differences**
   - The reflective nature of the competencies lends itself to individual differences
5. **Stretching all students**
   - The practice of teaching "processes" naturally lends itself to low entry and high ceiling activities and learning
6. **Assessment for learning**
   - Our fundamental focus area is on assessment and reflection
7. **Building horizontal connections**
   - Our goal is to see students applying their learning and reflection across all activities both in and out of school