Teacher/Teacher Librarian Assessment Collaborative Inquiry Project: Exploring Aspects of the Inuit Way of Life

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Part 1: Background

During the Spring of 2015, Stephanie Kornbluth, a grade five teacher, and Lisa Ainsworth, a teacher-librarian, undertook a collaborative inquiry project focusing on assessment and an inquiry on the Inuit Peoples’ way of life. The project was implemented at Great Lakes Public School in Brampton, a kindergarten to grade eight school within the Peel District School Board.

Jeanne Conte, Instructional Coordinator – Library, and Kristen Clarke, Instructional Coordinator – Assessment, at the Peel District School Board, oversaw the project.

Part 2: Learning Goals

The teacher and teacher librarian for the Assessment Collaborative Inquiry Project identified several learning goals for both the purposes of professional growth and improved student learning. They are summarized below as follows:

1. Explore different collaborative co-teaching and co-assessment models for the project and be flexible about their use.
2. Experiment and document the success of various assessment strategies for an inquiry based project.
3. Integrate aspects of the revised Ontario Curriculum for Social Studies, Grades 1 to 6, History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8 (Government of Ontario, 2013).
4. Build the schema of grade five students regarding aspects of the way of life of the Inuit Peoples.
5. Strengthen the questioning and inquiry skills of grade five students.

Part 3: Project Implementation and Findings

A. Planning the Details of the Project

Release time was provided for the teacher and teacher-librarian to ensure that they had several opportunities to plan, reflect, and revise parts of the project as it proceeded. The first meeting was used to select our collaborative co-teaching model and identify any required resources.
Collaborative Co-teaching Models

At the start-up meeting, the group used a professional resource entitled, *Collaboration and Co-Teaching: Strategies for English Learners* (Hoingsfeld and Dove, 2010), to identify various co-teaching models and consider the advantages of each. At the first planning meeting, the teacher and teacher-librarian also discussed each model as it might apply to their specific project and how each might benefit the students.

Two different co-teaching models were selected. First, the “One Group” model was selected for teaching lessons on questioning. This model allows for one lead teacher and one teacher “teaching on purpose” (Hoingsfeld and Dove, pg. 75-76, 2010). Second, a modified version of the “Two Groups” model was chosen to teach using authentic artifacts and art prints. This model involves each teacher teaching a smaller group, half the class in this case, developing the same skills but with different content.

Required Resources

The teacher and teacher-librarian reviewed the overall and specific curriculum expectations from *The Ontario Curriculum for Social Studies, Grades 1 to 6, History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8* (Government of Ontario, 2013) and grouped several skills and an overall expectation related to formulating questions, gathering and organizing data, and understanding context, that would help to guide this project and move forward to an upcoming inquiry project (Appendix A).

The teacher decided to teach several mini-lessons on “What makes a good question?” while the teacher-librarian reviewed picture books that may capture some aspects of the Inuit People’s way of life.

The question builder frames black line master from *Q Tasks* (Koechlin and Zwaan, pg. 71, 2014) was deemed to be a useful scaffolding device for students. The frames handout was enlarged to a 11’ X 14” size and laminated so that students could reuse the frames throughout the project. A rubric was also selected from *Q Tasks* (Koechlin and Zwaan, pg. ? , 2014) and revised to define the “look fors” for formative assessment purposes and to guide students to an understanding of the characteristics of a good question. Some success criteria were developed and written on chart paper to be displayed in the class and library (Figure 1). These were reviewed with students as mini-lessons in advance of the collaborative teaching. Students discussed the documents and were asked to provide input.
The picture book *Mikissuk’s Secret* (Lafonta, 2006) was determined to be an interesting story that would allow students to practice writing questions arising from a literary work. This book about an older brother and his younger sister provides details on hunting and related tools of the Inuit Peoples in both the text and images. A short video on challenging vocabulary was made by the teacher-librarian using Adobe Voice. The video was posted on the class blog three days in advance of the lesson. Students were asked to view this at home and ask any questions at school prior to the initial lesson. The teacher-librarian believed that this small initiative would introduce the class to a flipped classroom activity and take advantage of a well-established classroom blog.

There was also a desire to create hands-on lessons that would engage student learning in a new way. Therefore, a group of visual arts prints from Art Image were assembled which captured traditional and modern Inuit and First Nations artwork. Two sets of authentic Inuit artifacts were ordered from the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) – The Inuit Men and the Inuit Women Resource Boxes. These boxes can be ordered on the ROM website: [http://www.rom.on.ca/en/learn/travelling-programs/travelling-edukits/resource-boxes](http://www.rom.on.ca/en/learn/travelling-programs/travelling-edukits/resource-boxes)

The second book chosen, entitled *Kamik: an Inuit Puppy Story* (Uluadluak, 2012), is a picture book that focuses on the training and relationship of dogs and humans within the Inuit culture. This book was used as an opportunity for students to revisit their questioning of a literary work and choose their best question. For the teacher and teacher-librarian, this final assessment of student-generated questions would allow them to observe improvements in student learning.
B. Teaching

**Day 1 – Mikissuk’s Secret Read Aloud – Practice Writing Questions based on a Literary Work**

On Day 1, the entire grade five class came to the library for a read aloud of *Mikissuk’s Secret*. The teacher librarian acted as lead teacher while the classroom teacher answered questions or helped to solve problems as they arose (“teaching on purpose”). After reading students were asked to share some connections they may have with the story in order to generate some thinking. They were then given ten minutes to write questions using their question builder frames. They were then asked to share their question(s) with a partner and notice how their partner responded. Did a discussion occur? Was the question thick or thin? Did the student rethink their question as they read it out loud to their partner and rewrite or rephrase it as a result? This process began the feedback loop designed to “forward the learning” as described in *Making Classroom Assessment Work* (Davis, 2011).

After a break, the book was read aloud again to students while they were seated in table groups. During this time, students wrote questions while listening if they chose to do so. They were also given copies of *Mikissuks’ Secret* at their tables so that they could examine the text and images more closely. The groups were encouraged to carry out a picture walk of the book so that the whole group could review the images. Students were asked to think about questions that related to the content of the book in order to avoid questions that were more generic in nature, e.g., Why do you think the author wrote this story? This was done to emphasize question writing that may be used for research purposes later on.

Students were given an opportunity to share and discuss their questions while entering phase two of the “feed your learning forward” feedback loop. After reviewing the rubric, students were asked to choose their best question and write it on a sticky note. Each table group came up to the thick and thin question chart paper (Figure 2) and read out their questions. Using a class voting system – thumbs up if we agree, sideways if we don’t quite agree – students post their questions as thick or thin. The thin questions receive feedback and suggested improvements from the class at large.
Figure 2: Thick or Thin Question Chart

An exit ticket (Appendix B) was given to each student so that they could not only reflect on what they had learned that day but also something that they might like to learn next. For an example, refer to Figure 3.

Figure 3: Exit Ticket

Findings

Advantages with the “One Group” Model of collaborative teaching were as follows:

- With two teachers, there was an increased opportunity to give feedback during the lessons, conversations, and observations during student work time, e.g., relevant feedback in the moment.
- The observation and conversation components of the triangulation of evidence were enhanced.
- The teacher and teacher-librarian were able to listen to more student conversations and observe more of the process and work, which enabled them to intervene or revise their approach as necessary.
• The teacher and teacher librarian were able to participate in student conversations when appropriate often prompting further thinking.
• Since there was an increased in monitoring of the student work, lessons were revised on the spot while the learning was in progress.
• More differentiation of instruction occurred as personalized attention increased especially for English Language Learners and students with learning disabilities.

The “feedback to forward learning” assessment loops allowed students to:

• Build their confidence over three feedback opportunities
• Consult with a peer, share with the class and evaluate their questions on their own
• See the teacher as a guide rather than the final say
• Receive assessment for learning throughout the process
• Receive feedback in the moment allowing immediate redirection or improvement
• Create a bank of anchor questions for reference
• Use an exit ticket to consolidate their thinking and prepare for the next day

The success of the lesson was also predicated on the pre-teaching that occurred prior to Day 1. Although well worth it, the time commitment is significant in preparation, pre-teaching, delivering and debriefing the lesson. It should be noted that release time, or common planning time, is not always available for teachers and teacher-librarians to collaborate to this level.

Days 2 and 3 – Using Artifacts and Art Prints to Generate Questions

Artifacts Lesson

On Day 2, the teacher divided the class into two groups and kept one group to work with the authentic artifacts borrowed from the Royal Ontario Museum. The group began by reviewing the question builder frames, success criteria, and rubric.

The artifacts were laid out on the classroom tables (Figure 4). Students were invited to walk about the objects while receiving prompts from the teacher, such as:

• What have we learned so far this year in Social Studies that might help you to build a question?
• What inferences can you make about each item? Can you use this in your question?
• Once you have a question, try answering it yourself. What is the depth of the question (thick or thin)?
After approximately ten minutes of independent thinking time, students joined groups of two to three students to walk around the artifacts and to create additional questions while supported by their peers. Groups eliminated their “thin” questions and ultimately chose their “best” question writing it on a sticky note. Each student then shared their question with the class and placed it on an enlarged version of the rubric. If challenged, students would have to speak to their decision regarding their self-assessment of the question. Opportunities were provided to improve questions.

At the end of the session, the actual use of the Inuit artifacts was shared with the students.

Before leaving for the day, students were also asked to fill out a reflection on a “25 Cent Strategy” sheet (Appendix C). This reflection tool asked students to summarize their learning in 25 words. This allowed students to capture an important idea about their learning while being concise.

“Best” questions and reflections were collected by the teacher and specific written feedback was given to each student the following day to further improve their questioning for the next round. This group would go on to generating questions on art prints the next day (Day 3).

After debriefing with the teacher-librarian, the teacher thought it might be more efficient to share the use of the Inuit artifacts with the students at the beginning of the lesson with the second group. Students were still given ten minutes to explore the artifacts but before they wrote their questions, they discussed the purpose of the artifacts. This
eliminated generic questions such as “What is it made out of?” and “What is it used for?”

**Findings**

Using the Inuit Men and the Inuit Women Resource Boxes from the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) allowed students to:

- Participate in a unique, hands-on experience
- Work with authentic Inuit objects
- Experience how the artifacts are used and whether they are still used in modern times and if so how have they changed? e.g., new materials

An increased level of focus as well as the active discussion and curiosity of all students showed that student engagement was strongly present.

Some disadvantages with the actual artifacts were noted as follows:

- The cost of borrowing the resource boxes was an extra cost.
- The resource material sent with the boxes was somewhat out of date.
- Some of the artifacts were showing their age, e.g., the fur mitt and slipper were shedding.
- Some of the artifacts were miniatures of the real artifact which caused some confusion for the students.

The teacher and teacher librarian wondered if viewing the artifacts in an authentic setting such as the ROM itself would add to the excitement of the learning. Also of note is the type of questions that were asked about the artifacts. The questions were of an inquiry nature whereas the questions arising from Mikissuk’s Secret were both discussion and inquiry questions. Since this was not anticipated the rubric was sometimes awkward to use. It is thought that teachers need to decide if students’ questions need to be inquiry or discussion questions up front. It would be valuable to develop a separate rubric for each question type.

**Art Prints Lesson**

On Day 2, the teacher divided the class into two groups and sent one group to the school library to work with the Art Image art prints (Figure 5). The group began by reviewing the question builder chart, success criteria and rubric.
The Art Image prints were placed in various locations throughout the library. Students were shown each of the ten prints and were given some prompts as to what they might notice with each of the artworks and how the work might speak to a person, such as:

- What have we learned so far this year in Social Studies that might help you to build a question?
- What inferences can you make about what you are seeing in the artwork (e.g., elements and principles of art, materials, subject)? Can you use this in your question?
- Once you have a question, try answering it yourself. What is the depth of the question (thick or thin)?

They were then invited to go to an art print that somehow spoke to them. The students began by talking about the print with other students that chose the same print. Then each student wrote a question to share with a partner. Later sharing with the class allowed for students to decide if the question was thick or thin. The student had the opportunity to adjust the question based on comments and suggestions from classmates.

Students were then asked to move to a second print and then eventually a third and final print. Again they discussed the print with their group and then wrote a question. The feedback process as described above is repeated each time.

Students chose their “best” question and wrote it on their question builder frames in order to receive specific written feedback from the teacher the next day. This group would go on to generating questions on artifacts the next day (Day 3).

On Day 3 students were offered the choice of the exit ticket or the 25 Cent Strategy to capture their thoughts and ideas.
Findings

Using the Art Image art prints allowed students to:

- Participate in a unique, hands-on experience
- Observe authentic Inuit prints (some art prints were created by First Nations)
- Go to the print that “spoke” to them offering choice
- Change their group with each round of art print observation
- Move around the library
- Allow comparison between the artworks, e.g., finding owls in the art and asking questions about the significance of colour

An increased level of focus as well as the active discussion and curiosity for all students showed that student engagement was strongly present.

Some disadvantages with the actual art prints were noted as follows:

- Difficulty in obtaining a variety of Inuit prints from the school resources (A few First Nations prints were added for variety and extra choice)
- Most prints were poster size but some were postcard size making them more difficult to share

As was the case with the artifacts, the art prints generated more inquiry questions as opposed to discussion questions.

Advantages with the “Two Groups” Model of collaborative teaching were as follows:

- Smaller groups allowed the teacher/teacher-librarian to focus on those students that required assistance
- Allows for differentiated instruction
- Enabled the building and expanding of vocabulary and background knowledge
- Two separate spaces allowed students to move around and use the space
- Provided teachers with an opportunity to adjust their lessons between groups to improve on student learning based on their debrief
- Able to follow through with the “feedback to forward learning” assessment loop

Although the smaller student groups were an asset, teachers must continue to be mindful of the groupings and the fact that less students may pose some challenges such as less ideas being shared or a student being left out.

Day 4 – *Kamik: an Inuit Puppy Story* Read Aloud – Writing Questions with Some Support
On Day 4, the entire Grade 5 class revisited the library for a read aloud of *Kamik: an Inuit Puppy Story*. The teacher-librarian acted as lead teacher while the classroom teacher answered questions or helped to solve problems as they arose (“teaching on purpose”). Students were invited to jot down ideas as they popped into their heads on their question builder frames. After reading, students were asked to summarize the beginning, middle, and end of the story to ensure comprehension. They were also asked how the story compared to *Mikissuk’s Secret* and how the two stories illustrate the Inuit way of life.

After this discussion students were given a few minutes to write a question(s) based on the story using their question builder frames. They were then asked to share their question(s) with a partner and notice how their partner responded. By this point, most students were able to assess their question based on their partner’s response, i.e., the question made sense when read out loud, it was understood, and a discussion ensued.

After a break, the book was read again aloud to students while they were seated in table groups. During this time, students were encouraged to write down any new questions while listening. They were also given copies of *Kamik: an Inuit Puppy Story* at their tables so that they could examine the text and images more closely.

Students were given an opportunity to share and discuss their questions with their groups but eventually choose their best question to submit to the teacher and teacher librarian for assessment. The intent was that this final lesson on writing questions would be done more independently by those that were ready while still providing support for those that needed it (e.g., teacher, partner, table group, question builder frames, rubric).

**Findings**

*Kamik: an Inuit Puppy Story* is a picture book that reminds children the importance of patience, our elders, and the loyalty and comfort a pet can provide to humans. In addition, the book gives us a view into contemporary Inuit culture and every day way of life.

This picture book was determined to be at grade level for the grade five class and yet some discrepancies arose. Firstly, many of the students have never had a dog or a pet and this seemed to cause some difficulty understanding the relationship between the puppy and the various family members. There was also some confusion with the generations and the genders. For example, the grandparents were present but the parents of the young boy were not. The students were also unsure about the role of the men versus the women in raising and caring for the dogs.

The teacher and teacher-librarian would recommend using *Kamik: an Inuit Puppy Story* on Day 1 for the initial lesson where more opportunity for discussion was given. *Mikissuk’s Secret* would be a better choice for the final lesson as it encompasses more of the Inuit way of life, even showing some of the artifacts that were contained in the resource boxes from the ROM. In addition, the students may have more connections to
Mikissuk’s Secret as the main characters are brother and sister and most of the students have siblings or a good knowledge of the relationship between them. This would allow for deeper discussion and richer questions.

At this point in the project the students had been exposed to the process of writing questions many times. There was evidence that they were more at ease in applying their learning. However, they were also showing signs of fatigue in using the question builder frames and rubric, and in obtaining feedback from the other students. It is recommended that the number of steps for sharing be reduced. Signs of tiring of the reflection tools had been noted earlier and, therefore, a reflection was not required for this lesson.

C. Assessment

Day 5 – Reviewing and Debriefing All Assessment for Learning Materials

On Day 5, the teacher and teacher-librarian reviewed all their observations and collected questions and reflections in order to assess student learning and evaluate the actual assessment practices.

The formative assessment for this project occurred in the following ways:

1. The feedback to “forward the learning” assessment loop used by students;
2. Discussions with peers, small groups, teacher, and class;
3. Observations by the teachers;
4. The reflection tools, the exit ticket and the 25 Cent Strategy, used by students and teachers;
5. Specific written feedback by teachers for students; and
6. A grading of a selected “best” question by the teachers for students.

Findings

Successes related to the assessment for this project were noted as follows:

- Triangulation of evidence – observation, discussion, and product - provided rich and varied data to assess learning.
- The rubric, success criteria, and question builder frames allowed students to scaffold learning, support each other, and improve their writing of questions.
- Students provided input into the success criteria/rubric.
- The success criteria/rubric were provided in student friendly language.
- Sharing with a partner, small group, and class offered support but also required that students were engaged in accountable talk.
- Oral language opportunities were woven into each lesson.
- Small groups allowed for teachers to make observations and listen carefully to student discussions.
- Teachers took advantage of teachable moments to enhance instruction.
During lessons, discussions, and observations both teachers and students gave feedback that was relevant at that exact time, i.e., feedback in the moment. Students referred back to the specific written feedback from teachers when writing new questions. Students could see and track their own progression and the quality of their questions. Students see the teacher as a guide and not as the final say. Students were accountable and no time was wasted. Students used the reflections to consolidate their thinking and prepare for the next day. Expectations for each task were clear and included a timeframe. The assessment process could be replicated for most inquiries. The project allowed for the teacher and teacher librarian to meet, debrief, and moderate together.

Although the last question the students submitted was the one that the teacher and teacher librarian placed on the rubric, it wasn’t necessarily the students’ best question. This confirms the importance of the entire process and the collection of a variety of data, i.e., triangulation of evidence.

D. Conclusion

The Assessment Collaborative Inquiry Project was successful in meeting the learning goals of the project. Both enhanced professional growth and improved student learning were noted.

The project allowed the teacher and teacher-librarian the opportunity to:

- explore and implement two different collaborative co-teaching and co-assessment models in addition to several excellent professional resources
- develop the same skills for students but with different content by modifying one of the models so that each teacher taught a smaller group, half the class in this case
- give more feedback during the lessons, conversations, and observations during student work time, e.g., relevant feedback in the moment
- listen to more student conversations and observe more of the process and work which enabled them to intervene or revise their approach as necessary
- experiment and document various assessment strategies for several inquiries (i.e., picture books, artifacts, art prints), including the “forward the learning” assessment loop
- enhance the observation and conversation components of the triangulation of evidence
- delve deeper into the revised The Ontario Curriculum for Social Studies, Grades 1 to 6, History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8 (Government of Ontario, 2013) and integrate relevant sections
• include engaging, hands-on learning that was inviting and exciting for students
• build on the use of a successful class blog and try out a “flipped classroom” activity
• build the schema of grade five students regarding aspects of the way of life of the Inuit Peoples
• strengthen the questioning and inquiry skills of grade five students and document the evidence of learning.

Bibliography


Government of Ontario. (2013). The Ontario Curriculum – Social Studies, Grades 1 to 6, History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8. Toronto, ON.


Koechlin, Carol and Zwaan, Sandi. (2014). Q Tasks, 2nd Ed. Pembroke Publishers: Markham, ON.


Uluadluak, Donald. (2012). Kamik: an Inuit Puppy Story. Inhabit Media Inc.: Iqaluit, NU.
Appendix A

Relevant Excerpts from The Ontario Curriculum – Social Studies, Grades 1 to 6, History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8

Grade 5 Social Studies – Overall Expectations (page 108)

A3. Understanding Context: describe significant features of and interactions between some of the main communities in Canada prior to 1713, with a particular focus on First Nations and New France

The Social Studies Inquiry Process (page 61)

Formulate Questions

Students formulate questions, either independently or with guidance from the teacher, and either individually or in groups:
- to explore various events, developments, and/or issues that are related to the overall expectations in order to identify the focus of their inquiry
- to help them determine which key concept (or concepts) of social studies thinking is relevant to their inquiry
- that reflect the selected concept(s) of social studies thinking
- to develop criteria that they will use in evaluating evidence and information, making judgments or decisions, and/or reaching conclusions

Gather and Organize

Students:
- collect relevant data, evidence, and/or information from primary sources, secondary sources, and/or field studies
Appendix B

Exit Ticket

Name:

Something that I learned today:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Something that I would like to learn next:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Appendix C

The 25 Cents Strategy

Using as close to 25 words as possible, write a sentence describing something important about today's lesson.

______________________________________________________________________________