

# 2012-2013 AESN Inquiry Case Study

**School Name:** Pleasant Valley Elementary School  
**District:** SD #68 Nanaimo Ladysmith  
**Inquiry Team Members:** Chris Angelucci, Kathy Bergman, Lesley Carter, Donna Gannon, Teri Hooper, Jan Kennedy, Wendy Phillips

## **AEEA Goal Area:**

**Body – How can we enhance all students and adults’ understanding of Aboriginal perspectives, people & contemporary context?**

**Mind – How can we build academic success for Aboriginal learners?**

**Emotion – How can we enhance Aboriginal students’ sense of belonging?**

## **Question/Focus:**

*Will the presence of traditional Aboriginal culture, language, and perspectives in the whole school setting increase Aboriginal awareness amongst all students?*

*Will the teacher collaboration focused on explicit learning strategies increase the academic performance of Aboriginal learners?*

## **Scanning**

Our project originated with recognizing a school wide need to be more actively inclusive with new Aboriginal students and families coming from a nearby elementary school, which closed. We noticed that these families were not as visibly present in our building or consistently participating in school activities. We also noted that many of our Aboriginal students were amongst our most vulnerable academic learners, specifically in literacy.

## **Focus**

We have developed a school wide culture of multi-age clan groups that meet regularly to learn about Canadian Aboriginal culture, language, and historical significance. Our clan groups are connected to the Eagle, Bear, Wolf and Whale & tied to the traits of belonging, generosity, independence & mastery. This year we focused on Northern Inuit cultural awareness. We also have developed, through teacher collaboration, writing rubrics and student exemplars to assess, teach and monitor writing development with all students. This year we used these tools and met to discuss successful teaching strategies, assessment for learning strategies, and make any improvements on our school wide rubrics/assessment document.

## **Hunch**

Over the past three years, as a staff we realized that we did not all have the background information to teach our students about Canadian Aboriginal history, perspectives, and present day matters. We had an increase to 13% Aboriginal students in our school and we were not seeing pride in their cultural background. Our other students did not have this cultural awareness either. Teachers were reporting that many Aboriginal students had poor attendance and were reluctant readers and writers.

## **New professional learning**

We organized professional development learning for our staff on Northern Inuit culture, both historically and today. We searched out and bought literature and art resources. We invited guest speakers and sought expert advice through our school district Aboriginal Team. As a staff we continued to meet collaboratively to discuss literacy needs in the school.

## Taking action

Throughout the school year the Clan groups met to learn about and experience the Northern Inuit cultural history and present day way of life. We immersed the whole school for the first week in September in mini-workshops and activities to introduce this Aboriginal cultural perspective. We had monthly meetings with the Clan groups to further explore and reinforce this learning. In May, we had a celebration, which started with Northern Games in the gym and then a gallery walk. All students walked around the school to see learning projects completed by every student.

The majority of our classrooms had bi-weekly lessons on our local Aboriginal language with Elder Jerry Brown. He also provided drumming lessons to groups.

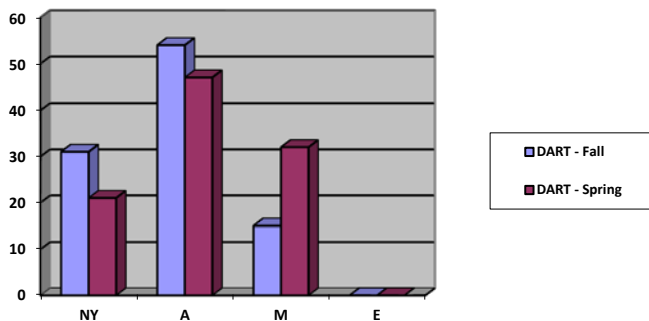
For our literacy focus, all primary teachers were committed to small guided reading groups and used the PM Benchmark assessment. All teachers also followed the school developed writing rubrics and used the student exemplars for assessment and to teach next steps. They completed two school writes as well. Intermediate teachers used DART assessment for reading comprehension.

## Checking

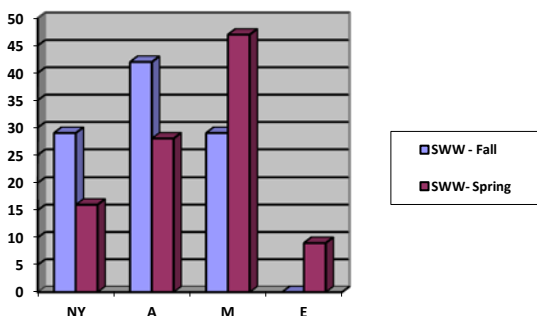
We were focusing this year on having students use student rubrics, and writing strategies with a connection to Aboriginal stories and writings. We have included data from DART, and the School Wide Writes, for our Aboriginal learners:

	NY		A		M		E	
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
DART Fall	31%	4	54%	7	15%	2	0%	0
DART Spring	21%	4	47%	9	32%	6	0%	0
Write Fall	29%	9	42%	13	29%	9	0%	0
Write Spring	16%	5	28%	9	47%	15	9%	3

DART data as a % of the Aboriginal population –  
Fall (blue) & Spring (purple)



School Wide Write Data as a % of the Aboriginal population- Fall (blue) & Spring (purple)



We are creating ways to connect with parents, and increase their presence at our school. We will continue to look at ways to record participation & increase belonging in our school community.

Selected Event	%	# (of families)
Parent Teacher Interviews	81%	30
Fall Potluck	16%	6
Christmas Concert	73%	27

### **Reflections/Advice**

Students were keen to learn about the North of Canada. We witnessed new learning and interest in the peoples, animals, and lifestyle of the Inuit. Our celebration of learning was fascinating as each class project was unique, and some classes did individual student projects. They all represented learning and success with our project.

We have had a small group of teacher leaders meet to organize Clan activities and focus. As we have made the Clan groups a part of our accepted school culture for three years, it is time to pass more responsibility to the whole staff. We have students that represent all three groups of Aboriginal cultures so have committed to learning about the third group – Métis – next school year. There is a small group of Aboriginal students whose attendance is still poor. As a result, academic progress is compromised. We would like to find a way to reach these families more effectively.

A school wide focus on Aboriginal cultural pride and acceptance is possible. We aim for our students to learn acceptance and understanding for all cultures.

***EVERY learner crossing the stage with dignity, purpose and options.***