

**ABORIGINAL ENHANCEMENT SCHOOLS NETWORK
2011-2012**

**PLEASANT VALLEY ELEMENTARY
#68 Nanaimo Ladysmith**

Leadership Team

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School Context/Community Involvement

Pleasant Valley Elementary School is a K–7 school situated in Nanaimo, BC on Vancouver Island. Our school community has 305 students, with a diverse socio-economic population in an urban area. There are approximately 50 bus students. There are 32 self-identified Aboriginal students. Pleasant Valley is in a newly expanded catchment area, and as a staff we have been working to integrate the students and families into our school community. We have a strongly connected Parent Advisory Council (PAC), and our parents are supportive of our school goals & projects.

Over the past two years, we have continued to embed a full school focus on Aboriginal culture, history, and language within our curriculum content, and school wide activities. The staff have been very supportive, and connected to this focus. The whole school approach began with a focus on “the spirit of belonging” using multi age, family groupings based on four clan animals, and connects with Dr. Martin Brokenleg’s “Circle of Courage” model.

School Questions

Will the inclusion of Aboriginal content, culture, and perspective in school-based activities increase a sense of belonging for Aboriginal students, and their families at Pleasant Valley School?

Will a sense of belonging then increase the likelihood of academic success?

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

Will the teacher collaboration focused on writing skills, student exemplars, and Aboriginal literature increase writing quality and cultural awareness as measured by the BC performance standards?

Focus of Inquiry

We looked at our school community and recognized a need for a more inclusive connection to the Aboriginal community within our school population based on the recent increase in numbers of Aboriginal students. Staff had also noted that our Aboriginal families had not been a visible part of the school community. We recognized that all students, staff, and families would benefit from a stronger connection to the local Aboriginal culture, history, perspective and language.

Link to the District Enhancement Agreement

We focused on connecting the SD#68 District Enhancement Agreement Goals listed with our school goals: To enhance all students, and all adults’ understanding of Aboriginal history, culture and contemporary Aboriginal context (Mind); to enhance Aboriginal students’ sense of belonging within schools (Body); to improve the academic achievement for all Aboriginal students (Spirit); and to enhance the participation of Aboriginal communities, parents, and Elders (Emotion).

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Strategies

We created four clan groups based on multi age, family groupings. Dr. Martin Brokenleg’s “Circle of Courage” model and research were used to match the clan groups to qualities. The four clan groups are: the Killer Whale Clan (the spirit of belonging), the Eagle Clan (the spirit of mastery), the Bear Clan (the spirit of independence), and the Wolf Clan (spirit of generosity). We have started each September with a full week of clan group activities with an environmental focus, stewardship, literacy, and numeracy as key components. We also focused on family activities (a family picnic, and a fall potluck) throughout the year.

We collaborated throughout the year with the District Aboriginal team to deepen our understanding and our school wide focus. The staff committed to learning more about Aboriginal perspective, history, and understandings with the expertise and teachings of Elder Jerry Brown in their classrooms. He taught Hul’quim’num, interwoven with drumming, and other cultural activities, with a focus on local knowledge, throughout the year. This culminated in a whole school visit to the Longhouse in May. We were also fortunate to have an Aboriginal author, Julie Flett, in to work with our primary students, and we were able to connect with 35 Vancouver Island University (VIU) students to work in small groups on Aboriginal tales and story telling.

School Findings

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	69%	9	23%	3	8%	1	0%	0
DART Spring	35%	6	47%	8	18%	3	0%	0
Write Fall	41%	7	59%	10	0%	0	0%	0
Write Spring	11%	3	54%	15	32%	9	4%	1

We also noticed a strong presence of Aboriginal families at our school events. Students were very respectful, and participated in the visit to the Longhouse.

AESN Plans for 2012-2013

We will continue to focus on building awareness of Aboriginal life, culture, language, and perspective. We will focus specifically for the next school year on the Northern Canadian Inuit culture, past & present, in our September start up. We will continue to use personal writing exemplars and rubrics, and continue to help all students with their “next step” for writing improvement. We will continue to use Aboriginal literature to model and enhance writing skills for all students. We will focus on explicitly using Assessment for Learning (AFL) strategies, in our collaborative, grade group meetings.

Reflections, Advice

We believe that the Pleasant Valley School community is now more inclusive of Aboriginal students, families, culture and language. Pleasant Valley has grown as a community of caring people and is a positive, welcoming place. The staff are feeling encouraged, and we are in our second year of our Pleasant Valley Community project. Providing release time for school planning and collaboration, a great connection with our District Aboriginal staff, and a positive team with the principal and staff members are all key components. Continuing to find resources to sustain our collaborative time will be imperative.

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