

**ABORIGINAL ENHANCEMENT SCHOOLS NETWORK
2011-2012**

**W L MCLEOD ELEMENTARY
#91 Nechako Lakes**

Leadership Team

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School Context/Community Involvement

The Literacy Teacher has weekly involvement with a local group of Aboriginal mothers who are engaged in efforts to live healthier lives through attending a social/support group that meets twice weekly. The group is a collaborative effort between many organizations, including a charitable society called Vanderhoof Neighbourlink, Carrier Sekani Family Services, Saikuz First Nation and School District #91, Nechako Lakes.

The need for extra help in schools was communicated to the moms in an effort to solicit their involvement in a volunteer reading project. The need for stronger relationships between schools and Aboriginal community members was part of the message and participant opinions were assessed through a small survey before and after the project.

School Inquiry and Action

School Question

How will a volunteer reading program that engages Aboriginal parents in reading with students (coaching), once a week for 9 weeks, improve relationships between Aboriginal communities and WL McLeod Elementary?

Focus of Inquiry

The coach training will include the use of learning intentions, criteria & descriptive feedback and self assessment for coaches as well as for students.

The relationship building involved repeated positive face to face interactions that build social trust.

Links with District Enhancement Agreement

Improve Relationships between School District No. 91, schools, local Aboriginal communities and parents

Strategies

- Teach reading strategies to volunteer coaches that students are learning in the classroom. Present the strategies in the form of success criteria for strong primary student readers.
- Coach the volunteers to use descriptive feedback and debrief with them after each volunteer session.
- Provide whatever support necessary to get the volunteers to the school.

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School Findings

Adult Learning:

Number of learners: 5 in the beginning, 3 at the finish

How comfortable are you about coming into WL McLeod Elementary School?

| | Very Uncomfortable | Somewhat Uncomfortable | Neutral | Somewhat Comfortable | Very Comfortable |
|------|--------------------|------------------------|---------|----------------------|------------------|
| Pre | | | | 1 | 4 |
| Post | | | | 1 | 2 |

How comfortable would you be about going into other schools in Vanderhoof?

| | Very Uncomfortable | Somewhat Uncomfortable | Neutral | Somewhat Comfortable | Very Comfortable |
|------|--------------------|------------------------|---------|----------------------|------------------|
| Pre | | 1 | | 3 | 1 |
| Post | | | 1 | 1 | 1 |

- The production of a professional video gave the work of this project an increased level of importance in the eyes of the volunteers (and the educator!).
- Even though the survey indicated that all participants were quite comfortable coming to the school before the project began; only two actually had come to the school or any school in the community in the year previous to this project. They were actually in the school almost 100% more than in the past.
- One of the two volunteers unable to finish the project later had the confidence to apply to enrol in an Aboriginal Early Childhood Education program.
- One volunteer became employed as a child-minder for the “mom’s group”.

Student Learning

This project was so small in scope (only 9 volunteer reading sessions at best for each child) that it wouldn’t be appropriate to attribute reading progress results to this small intervention. What are reportable are observations of children’s thoughts about the process: See the video at <http://www.noii.ca/video-gallery.html>



This team is still in the beginning stages of learning to read, and learning to coach reading.

AESN Plans for 2012-2013 and Reflections

This inquiry’s primary purpose was to improve relationships between Aboriginal community members while providing young Aboriginal mothers an opportunity to explore potential employment and life opportunities through working with children at a local school (Helping People Live Their Best Lives). Student learning was minimal given the short time span of this inquiry, but the learning the adults

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experienced at all levels of this mini project was significant, although not really measurable numerically. Both volunteers and the educator leading the project gained from helping students with their reading, both from the positive reactions of the students when they got to be with their reading coaches, and from the confidence the volunteers gained in their own abilities to make a difference in the lives of children.

The lessons for the educator leading the inquiry were many, most of which have to do with the multiple barriers that prevent many Aboriginal mothers from accessing employment or higher education. Five mothers began with the project and three finished.

One other lesson was the challenging logistics of organizing a project like this (supporting the process to complete criminal records checks, transportation, child-minding for the volunteers, and organizing the reading sessions during the busy schedule of a school). Many times, classes were out on field trips, or children were sick, or volunteers were sick, or sometimes there was a shortage of childminding help. All of this sometimes resulted in preventing the educator from being focused on the actual reading sessions themselves.

The Reading Coach Layer

If this project is replicated in the coming school year, this educator will team with one classroom teacher and only select students from that class. The volunteers will be introduced as important members of the adult team and the scheduled sessions will be more effectively integrated into the classroom structure. Enabling the volunteers to view a mini lesson by the teacher see how the reading strategies are taught will further empower them to coach their little buddies even more effectively. The volunteers were just beginning to understand how the strategies worked and were only starting to move away from the fairly old and traditional use of 'sound it out' as a coaching term.

The Relationship with Aboriginal Communities Layer

Healthy relationships take time to cultivate. The literacy teacher's continued involvement with young Aboriginal mothers and supporting them to live their best lives will be the key to whether the project happens again. Seeking their advice about what worked and what didn't will be critical to a successful inquiry. Working with Saikuz First Nation to request that mothers who volunteer can qualify for daycare on that day for their own children may eliminate some of the logistical challenges with child-minding while providing acknowledgement from the band that volunteering in schools is valued.