



2013-2014 AESN Case Study

School: Betty Huff Elementary **District:** SD36 Surrey

Area of focus: Enhancement Agreement

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Question / focus area: How can we present opportunities for staff to integrate Aboriginal content in classroom curriculum through school-wide inquiry?

Scanning: We have looked at the learners in our school and noticed that there is an opportunity for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners to acquire further knowledge of Aboriginal cultures. We have Aboriginal resources available but in some cases they are not being used to the fullest extent.

Focus: We would like to focus on increasing the integration of Aboriginal content through-out the school by reviving our previous work with the cedar tree. We would like our students to have an understanding of the importance of the cedar tree to Northwest Aboriginal People.

Hunch: We had a hunch that by creating a larger school-based and themed project we could increase interest, knowledge, and involvement for staff and students. There are a variety of simple activities, stories, and projects that we can engage in to learn important cross-cultural, life lessons to instill positive behavior at an early age. These are values that our children can take with them their whole lives (respecting one another, speaking one at a time).

New professional learning: Part of our group visited Sir Macdonald Elementary, an Aboriginal focused school to see how Aboriginal content is integrated in the curriculum. We also went to the Native Education College to see their indigenous garden and learn how we can enhance ours as a means of integrating Aboriginal education.

We learned that is possible to integrated Aboriginal stories/culture into every aspect of learning. Some of these areas include: 3D art (the ceramic petroglyph project), technology, language arts/social studies.

Through this inquiry process we have recognized the necessity to ‘create a buzz’ and present classroom teachers with opportunities for genuine engagement with Aboriginal content. This allows themselves and their students to learn about a variety of Aboriginal customs, teachings, and stories. We have also learned that integrating Aboriginal customs in classroom routines such as sitting on the ground in a circle during discussions brings a heightened awareness and appreciation of Aboriginal beliefs.

Through site visits, professional reading, collaboration and conversation with a variety of members from the Aboriginal community we have been inspired to initiate classroom and school-wide projects.

Taking action: We have had a district cultural facilitator come and discuss the importance of the paddle, spindle whorl, the story of *The Red and Black Wolf*, and the cedar tree with all of our K-6 students. We have commissioned a carver to create a 3ft diameter spindle whorl with the image of the red and black wolf on it. One of our Grade 3 classes made ceramic petroglyphs to tell the story of the cedar tree (Kux Pay) that will be hung in our courtyard. In addition, all students have had the opportunity to create their own miniature paddle and learn of its significance, watch a hoop dancing performance, and participate in a variety of workshops offered by our Cultural leaders. We interviewed students, staff, and families to acquire feedback and gather evidence of learning with respect to Aboriginal education.

Checking: Both our students and staff displayed a noted enthusiasm and interest in learning more about Aboriginal culture through the various activities and presentations our committee offered. With regards to the Social Responsibility Performance Standards, the students are able to articulate the positive impact making healthy physical and social choices that will benefit them. The students also have a deeper understanding of the connection between humans and the environment as well as their shared responsibility in family and community. To measure this we have collected anecdotal comments from staff and students. (Please see addendum)

Reflections/Advice: The lessons from Aboriginal stories apply to all ethnicities, cultures, and socioeconomic levels; they do not depict Aboriginals as “others.” These lessons encourage social responsibility, equality, respect, responsibility, and relationships among the earth, humans, and other animals. All desired values for our students. Our recommendation for other schools interested in creating a greater overall awareness of Aboriginal education/content is to simply arrange for engaging performances, presenters, storyteller visits, hands on activities and offer these to classroom teachers. We have found this creates a ‘buzz’ that is infectious.

Further plans include enhancing our existing garden with marking plaques and developing ready-made lessons and activities (e.g., scavenger hunts) for students and staff. We hope to have the petroglyphs displayed. Also, we would like to offer students the opportunity to make a personal miniature spindle whorl much like the large one hanging in our entrance. We hope to present opportunities for the students to use their spindle whorl to create friendship bracelets. Lastly, we will use this carving during

gatherings as a means of recognizing the Aboriginal territory we reside on and the image of *Red and Black Wolf* to guide our overarching theme of social responsibility.