



2013-2014 AESN Case Study

School: Gibson Elementary School **District:** SD37 Delta

Area of focus: Enhancement Agreement

Inquiry Team Members: Linda Klassen, Arnie Leon, Peggy Ogloff

Contact Information: Linda Klassen: lklassen@deltasd.bc.ca

Question / focus area: Will an increase of teacher awareness and direct instruction using Aboriginal storytelling and art increase self-identification of Aboriginal students at Gibson Elementary School?

Scanning: This has been an exciting and rewarding journey for our team. In September 2013 Gibson Elementary School had less than 20 students who were identified as students with Aboriginal heritage, and in June 2014 we have 32 students who have registered with the Aboriginal program. Students who are Aboriginal are proud to claim their heritage and the other students in the school are more informed and thoughtful about their responses to Aboriginal cultural presentations.

Focus: Our key area of focus was to create a positive awareness of First Nations cultures through the sharing of traditional art forms and storytelling.

Hunch: In the past the Aboriginal program has been an add-on pull out program for Aboriginal students only. We saw a need for this standalone cultural program to continue, but to infuse the Aboriginal learnings and culture into all our classrooms and to highlight Aboriginal students in our assemblies.

New professional learning: In keeping with the ministry mandate, the Delta school district has signed the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement towards the goal of assisting Aboriginal students to be successful in school and to learn about their own culture. Our inquiry team benefitted from the many resources this afforded us. Either individually or as a group we were part of the following professional growth activities:

- Truth and reconciliation Walk for Peace
- Aboriginal Dinner
- Aboriginal School Assembly
- Intermediate/ Primary Aboriginal Curriculum planning workshops
- AESN meetings
- Truth and Reconciliation Day at Delview Secondary School

- Aboriginal support worker brought Aboriginal songs, dances and art into the school community
- Interactive Internet activities around the art and storytelling of the Haida people

Taking action:

- Each class had lessons focused on Aboriginal art, movie making, and storytelling
- Teachers on staff attended workshops around integrating the Aboriginal story into their lessons and many have heard the stories of survivors from the Residential Schools
- Assemblies commence with an acknowledgment that we are on Aboriginal territory
- Our Aboriginal support worker presents lessons around Aboriginal Culture (making cedar boxes, playing lacrosse, dancing and singing)

Checking: We have seen a noticeable difference in the sense of identity of our Aboriginal Students. Students will stop me in the hall and ask when we are having Aboriginal class, or “Is Mr. Leon coming today?” At the beginning of the year students were often reticent to be pulled out of regular class activity to go to Aboriginal Class. Now they are eager and engaged in what Mr. Leon has to teach them. Students from Grades 1-7 proudly walk down to the room where the Aboriginal class meets. During in-class presentations Aboriginal students proudly and respectfully share their cultural knowledge with their classmates. Perhaps the greatest evidence of our Inquiry project is that we have increased our Aboriginal program from 18 students to 32.

Reflections/Advice: We have learned that connectedness and a sense of place is crucial to identity. By acknowledging the harm that we as Canadians have done to our Aboriginal community and connecting that to the gifts that the Aboriginal people have given to Canadian culture, we are able to restore a sense of pride in identity to the families in our community that have Aboriginal heritage. By celebrating their culture through art and song, and letting them see themselves in the halls of their school, they are able to reclaim what they have lost.