



2013-2014 AESN Case Study

School: Ecole Marlborough School **District:** SD41 Burnaby

Area of focus: Student Level

Inquiry Team Member: Olwen Cowan, Tracy Healy, Alison Johnson, Holly Lloyd, Don Nordheimer, Shannon O'Rourke, Joyce Tait

Scanning: École Marlborough School is a campus which is housed in the East and West Buildings. It is the largest elementary school in British Columbia. There are 77 staff, including formal leaders, teaching staff, and support staff, with a K-7 enrollment. Based on May 2013 figures there are 1006 students. Marlborough has five primary and five intermediate English program Aboriginal students and one intermediate French program Aboriginal student.

Throughout this year at Marlborough, we have collected baseline data in Reading using various Reading assessments. The overall results indicate that all of our primary Aboriginal students and one intermediate Aboriginal student are struggling in literacy and, in particular, are far below our school average in reading.

Also, in our attempts to make Aboriginal peoples and culture readily visible or showcased prominently within the school community, we have always presented the Aboriginal students' projects in our show cases located in the main and east foyers but we have never felt it to be enough.

We also collected baseline data (using a scoring guide) from teachers who have Aboriginal students in their class and a few select teachers from primary and intermediate, and the English and French Programs (a control group) who do not have Aboriginal students in their classes. This data showed that many teachers were mostly in the *awareness* or *developing* columns with a few sections highlighted in the *acquiring* column. No teacher felt that they were in the *action/advocacy* column.

The Aboriginal students assessed themselves using guidelines for recognizing Aboriginal students. The overall results indicated that most of our primary Aboriginal students were in the *emerging* and *meeting* sections (either did not know their nation or were too shy to state, had difficulty showing respect for the passing of the eagle feather, were not engaged in the talking circle and lesson, and were not open to presenting their culture to peers). Our intermediate Aboriginal students were willing to share their traditions, stories, and culture, but lacked confidence to share their knowledge of Aboriginal culture with their peers. They also lacked leadership skills when initiating help towards the younger students.

With the leadership of our Aboriginal students, this inquiry will allow our non-Aboriginal students a chance to gain understanding and appreciation for Aboriginal culture, and give our Aboriginal students a sense of pride in their culture. We hope that by increasing the visible presence of Aboriginal peoples and culture within the school we will develop a greater sense of belonging and importance for our Aboriginal students, while at the same time increase the knowledge base regarding Aboriginal culture and history for our non-Aboriginal students.

Focus: Our focus for 2013-14 at Marlborough will be, “Will using reading materials with Aboriginal content have a positive impact on the reading abilities of Aboriginal students?” A secondary inquiry that will be, “Will celebrating Aboriginal culture through reflective and reflexive practices increase positive attitudes and support an enhanced understanding towards Aboriginal peoples?”

We will be working closely with our district Aboriginal school contact person and extending our learnings in the Aboriginal circle. After attending workshops about inquiry, and attending professional development on Aboriginal learning at two workshops, we purchased some new resources to extend our learning.

We will be working closely with the intermediate Aboriginal students following the framework of “Gradual Release of Responsibility” and the another literacy resource to support the development of their leadership/mentorship skills.

Hunch: One possibility for a high percentage of Aboriginal students not yet within expectations in reading is the lack of meaningful reading material for students. Along with this, family support is also an important contributor to academic success. Perhaps by providing Aboriginal reading materials, we can have more interest from families as well.

One possibility for the lack of leadership and confidence amongst our Aboriginal students is that as a group we have never “aimed for the stars” before. We met only during the circle and never had the opportunity or time to come together as a group and work together to discuss our learnings and ways to share our understanding and culture with others.

Taking action: The actions you propose to take to develop learner-focused inquiry.

- Reassess all student reading levels in Sept/Oct.
- Set shared and individual goals and plans for action (all having the goal “sharing our culture” with differentiated action plans, the younger ones to have a reading and respect goal and the older ones to have an individualized academic goal, but all to have a leadership/mentor goal).
- “Treat children as if they were what they ought to be and help them become what they are capable of being” Goethe
- Train the older students as mentors and leaders
- Meet two times per week

- One hour block to support cultural awareness, understanding, confidence, and pride in our culture in order to share our learnings with various classes
- One afternoon of 30 minute blocks for small group or individual primary students paired with an intermediate mentor/leader to support reading with confidence
- Cultural connection project in order to support the primary students presenting their book and cultural connection project to their class
- Intermediate students to receive the last two blocks to support achievement with their academic goals and peer mentorship discussions focusing on “What went well?” and “what next?”
- As a group, using a gradual release of responsibility framework acknowledge traditional territories at all assemblies
- Encourage historical participation with upper intermediate students presenting Aboriginal themes
- Work with librarian to book library times to present information to our peers.
- Use technology to present cultural learnings
- Purchase various Aboriginal readers
- Follow-up assessments throughout the year using various assessments to monitor progress
- Performance standard results compared from Sept 2013 – May 2014

Checking: We will compare results from reading level assessments and performance standard results to see if there has been noticeable improvement. In addition, we will get feedback from parents, staff, students, and Aboriginal students to assess their satisfaction with the “revised” Aboriginal support and the inquiry.

New Professional Learnings:

- We read a particular reading resource guide that included thinking sheets, indigenous cultural connections, and cultural notes to support and facilitate sharing of indigenous content
- Time to work with the Aboriginal students to strengthen connections and relationships of trust, strength, and support
- An Aboriginal circle program. We built on our learnings from the circle and in peer mentor groups created a presentation to share with over 14 classes in our school
 - With the intermediate students we read and discussed Aboriginal literature using a literature circle framework, which led to three students bringing their books to their classroom teacher to read aloud and discuss with the class.
 - The intermediate students also presented at our Historical Fair using themes based on our learnings
- First Peoples Principles of Learning - The power of involving the students in the process of extending their understandings of cultural teachings and providing leadership to enhance others’ knowledge and leadership.

This gave way to shining eyes, a sense of pride, engagement, and support system based on trust, respect, and a shared understanding, goal, and vision amongst our Aboriginal students

Reflection: As Burnaby North discovered, we at Marlborough also noticed as the inquiry progressed the sense of pride and ownership amongst our Aboriginal students engaged in the inquiry. Aboriginal students held their heads higher, their eyes shined brighter, they were more confident in asking for help, and sharing their knowledge and expertise.

The difference made was around the level of awareness throughout the school about Aboriginal education and the connections to our Enhancement Agreement. More people within the school than ever before were engaged in some learning and understanding around Aboriginal culture and protocols. This helped increase the level of pride and ownership. But most importantly, this inquiry reaffirmed the importance of time, time to:

1. Develop a sense of community amongst our Aboriginal students outside of school with Aboriginal support staff, Aboriginal Circle Program, Elders, and fieldtrips with other Aboriginal students in the district, for “it is the understanding of the need for teachers to talk less and listen more, to reconnect learners with their own communities, to guide and accompany them as students contribute more and more to the construction of their own learning based on their own lives and aspirations” (*C.Heller*). For the essence of building a community is “To lead students to come together, form a group, and to be there for one another” (*R.Peterson. Life in a Crowded Place*).
2. To facilitate engagement and a personal emotional connection inside the school with an Aboriginal school contact, during an Aboriginal Circle Program, and amongst each other with the older students taking on a mentorship role for the younger ones. “Feeding students’ minds and bodies are important but feeding their soul is far more important” (*N.Noddings*) as “motivation is at the heart of understanding. Understanding flourishes when students and teacher’s share and explore passions and join together in a community of learners” (*Harvey*).
3. To provide formative assessment to support the students in seeing themselves as able and capable, setting personal learning goals, providing opportunities for various ways to learn, and allowing choice in representing their learnings following the First Peoples Principles of Learning. It is the “knowing and understanding your students so well that you can identify their intrinsic motivation to learn and give birth to their joy in learning. To find meaningful ways to present material and invite your students to represent their learning in ways that value their experiences and their eloquence. To support and assist your students in finding their inner genius” (From *Teaching Stories* and *Every Student is a Genius*).