



2013-2014 AESN Case Study

School: Aspen Park Elementary **District:** SD71 Comox Valley

Area of focus: Transitions

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Question / focus area: What can students discover about themselves as learners and human beings when we bring younger and older students together for a variety of “real-world” learning experiences? How can we connect or interweave these learning experiences to the indigenous ways of knowing and how does this affect our students?

Scanning: We have noticed that in the past, a sense of isolation is present within schools, grades, subjects and that learning may not be connected to experiences with other schools and age groups. Learning in context of the real world and in an experiential way may not be happening for all learners. This past year in the beginnings of this project, we noticed an increase in community building due to our efforts to bring various age groups together. Are students able to have a strong sense of self and how that is important in the community? We would like to explore how students can articulate that their learning is meaningful and relevant to indigenous ways of knowing, and community building. In our society we do not always have the opportunity for cross-age groupings and stereotypes can prevail. Will this learning help to break down some of these barriers?

We felt that our students were very isolated in their learning. Although we had a few students from last year who were familiar with how we teach, using real world experiences as much as possible and the importance of community building, the majority of our students were new to this concept. On our first meeting with our older buddy class the students the grade 2 class were very apprehensive about the meeting, but after a fun afternoon in the forest with an interactive lesson about the names and uses of plants by the older student, my students couldn't wait to set up another meeting.

Focus: We consulted with teachers at each school level within our district. We will also bring in Aboriginal community members including Elders and district Aboriginal staff to

interact with our students and staff either with storytelling or other activities. The importance of this interaction is on the personal relationship and community members as role models. We will focus upon making connections and creating community to enhance sense of belonging and self through indigenous ways of knowing such as experiential, learning, cross generational and multi age roles and responsibilities, indigenous knowledge, storytelling, and exploration of identity. Our focus was to give the students a sense of belonging and a connection to nature through cross age group projects, Aboriginal storytelling and traditional ecological activities.

Hunch: We are seeing a lack of exploration of the indigenous ways of knowing in our classrooms and schools. This is perhaps due to the traditional curriculum model and views of what it means to be successful. We feel that by bringing these varying ages of students together and having them explore and identify with indigenous ways of knowing, their understanding of success may be broadened. We see how well older and younger students can work together and that their strengths may be highlighted.

We have noticed that when we have given the students opportunity to explore in the indigenous ways they get very excited with their learning. We would like to provide more real life experiences that would to make our students ask more questions and get more involved in their own learning.

New professional learning: As a group we would like to deepen our understanding of the indigenous ways of knowing. We will team-teach our lessons and share our own understanding and teachings of the indigenous ways of knowing. Our understanding has grown so much in the indigenous ways of knowing since we have started this project. Through books we have read and meeting Elders and story tellers, we feel that we have grown as teachers and we are excited about continuing our understanding of indigenous ways of knowing.

Taking action:

- As a formative assessment piece, we would like to do a teacher and student survey about self-awareness and indigenous ways of knowing and how they are successful.
- We will connect high school and middle school teachers with elementary teachers to create partnerships.
- These partnerships will liaise with Aboriginal education staff and community members.
- Depending on needs identified by the surveys done, a variety of activities can be put in place such as Aboriginal storytelling, cultural projects, experiential learning, traditional ecological activities, locally developed curriculum, outdoor education and community visits with our buddy classes.

Checking: The Indigenous students in our classes were proud of the knowledge base that they already had and whenever we had a guest story teller these student would then wanted to share stories that they had heard from their parents and Elders. We set up an area in our classroom where students who wanted to bring in artifacts and tell a

story or just share a story would have that opportunity. As the weeks went by more students would sign up to do a story telling session. After a while non indigenous students started to talk to their parents and ask them for stories that had been passed down to them and then they too would sign up for story telling corner. The students showed an improvement from the first reporting time in September to the last reporting period in the prescribed learning outcome in oral language, which we feel was due to the role models and the practice time they had from our involvement in this project.

Reflections/Advice: Bringing together older and younger students together with real world learning experiences has enriched our young student's lives. They have learned so much from their big buddies and about themselves through all of our interactions with Elders, storytellers, Aboriginal education staff, and each other. Our grade 2 students now have a greater sense of belonging and a better connection with nature. This whole project has been a fantastic experience for both students and teachers. We will continue to work with other schools and older students within our own schools next year.