



## 2013-2014 AESN Case Study

**School:** Glacier View Secondary Centre – Connections Program

**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?

Students in the alternate programs in SD71 are usually sent there because they have not been successful in mainstream schools. A sense of failure and a lack of connection to a broad and healthy community are common in many alternate school students. Through connecting with the community, learning about real issues, incorporating learning about Aboriginal culture and issues, and being involved with this project we saw students shine in ways that they might not in a regular classroom. Students who often sat quietly in the classroom became leaders for the younger students. Students who usually followed the group got up and took charge. Many students validated the indigenous knowledge that was shared with us. Our students who taught the younger students had something to offer. This was new to some. The most encouraging growth

that we saw was that our students with Aboriginal ancestry seemed connect and ask questions about their own histories and identities. A sense of pride seemed to grow as students shared their experiences and wanted to learn more about Aboriginal culture.

**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.

The *Connections* program focuses on creating a sense of community within the classroom and connecting students with real life issues and learning that takes place in the classroom and in the broader community. We spent this year learning from a variety of community experts about sustainable resources and social justice issues. Through our experience in the forest we learned about Aboriginal uses of a variety of forest species. Each student chose one species to learn about in particular. The leader's knowledge and other learning was included in an information card. Our students guided a grade 2/3 class in an exploration of the forest and shared what they had learned. The students gave their information cards to the grade 2/3 class for future reference.

As educators we wanted to understand what affect this experience and other community learning experiences would have on high school learners in an alternate setting. Would their sense of themselves as learners change as they played the role of educators?

**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.

In the coming year, we plan on providing more opportunities for the students to engage with younger students. Some of the students were nervous and scared of working with the grade 2/3 class. Through sharing ideas with other educators, we hope to develop a more effective way to help students work through their apprehension. We think more opportunities to work with younger students, perhaps in stages that build into the older students being leaders, could be successful.

We see the value in taking more time to have students learn about how they learn. When learning takes place outside of the classroom, through shared experiences and opportunities that aren't considered academic in a traditional sense, students sometimes struggle with valuing these experiences, even though so much growth can

be seen in so many ways. If students were more aware of what holistic, reflective learning is about and how they are benefiting from it, they would probably be less likely to question it.

Through this project, and the overall focus of the *Connections* program, it has become evident how successful it can be to learn with and from community members through experiences as opposed to text books. We are encouraged and will be incorporating more of this learning into the program in the fall.

**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.

We didn't realize at first how much what we are trying to do in the *Connections* program overlaps with the *First Peoples Principles of Learning*. We were excited to hear ideas about how educators are working to for positive change that supports the whole student. We look forward to learning more about how the *Connections* program can incorporate 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.

As we enter into the new school year, we see the value in more formally surveying about student self-awareness and indigenous ways of knowing. Although we brainstormed ideas with the class regarding working with younger students, we anecdotally gathered information after our experience with the grade 2/3 class. This process would offer more valuable information if it was done more formally.

Working with the Aboriginal education staff and community members was an integral part of the *Connections* program. The experiential learning that took place enabled students to learn in a variety of ways and be successful in school, something that many students had not experienced in a long time.

**Checking:** The connections we made with Aboriginal educators and younger students this year were very small compared to what is possible. We are just beginning our

learning in these areas and we look forward to developing this process in the coming year.

**Reflections/Advice:** We have become more aware of how Aboriginal ways of knowing are valuable for all students. For the upcoming school year we look forward to connecting with this or a similar group of educators again. Our hope is that the educators will be able to come together more often and that we will be able to provide more opportunities for the younger and older students to work together with a variety of educators and experiences.