



2014-2015 AESN Case Study

School: Bayside Middle School **District:** #63 Saanich

Area of Focus: Enhancement Agreement

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Our focus for this year: Canoe Carving Project for learner engagement and application of the First Nations learning principles

Scanning: We observed that our learners needed to know more about First Nations learning. We also observed that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners had few genuine relationships.

Focus: We designed and implemented a school-wide traditional canoe carving project for our middle school. This project involved the entire process of felling the cedar tree to carving the canoe to paddling on the sea. The canoe is approximately 22 feet long and paddles best as a single or can be a double for two smaller students. Through the process of participating in this hands-on project and by being connected to the canoe in this context, students and staff have become more connected to Coast Salish stories and traditions while working directly with our local carver, Curtis Henry, who is from the Pauquachin First Nation Community. The First Peoples Principles of Learning were connected to much of what we did in this project and it will also serve as a way to help embed Indigenous content further in the coming years. This project was also focused on the first two goals of our Education Enhancement Agreement. These goals are:

Goal 1: All students and staff will develop an increased knowledge of, and respect for, WSÁNEĆ, other First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples histories, cultures and traditions.”

Goal 2: WSÁNEĆ, other First Nations, Metis, and Inuit students will strengthen their sense of identity and belonging within the school's learning community.”

This is the context of our school and our local community. Within our school, we have a trusting relationship with our First Nation community members that made it possible to collaborate on this project and work together within a public school system. This relationship is reflective of the work and growth that has occurred as a result of the Education Enhancement Agreement.

Hunch: Our hunch was aligned with the evidence witnessed. Our engagement was deep and rich from both First Nations and non-First Nations. The dignity and pride expressed behaviourally, in written form, non-verbal presence really depicts the depth of engagement through this project. Evidence was gathered through observation. With each session that

classes participated, the students became more and more engaged and keen to get to the hands-on portion of their session. This became especially evident as they began to see the canoe really take shape. They were also keen to practice paddling in the canoe and to work together to ensure that their paddling technique was in unison. Many students were involved in this dry land practice and realized that paddling in unison is harder than it looks!

New professional learning: This project allowed us to lay a global foundation and shared understanding within our school staff of the importance of First Peoples' content being embedded naturally into classrooms, authentically and genuinely. This will be one of the highlighted topics in our ongoing collaboration structure for the next school year.

Taking action:

- We worked collaboratively with our carver and District Vice-Principal for Indigenous Education to ensure that we were following cultural protocols and practices.
- We planned each stage of the process so that there could be as much student involvement as possible. This included field trips to the tree site, carrying the canoe together at various points, carving, sanding, and paddling.
- We also involved a local drummer/singer to help with the ceremonial parts.
- We included an Elder by sharing our vision and having her provide support and guidance as we went along.
- We checked in with students and staff about their experiences throughout.
- We had each student do a final reflection about the 14 month process of carving this traditional canoe. These reflections were positive and provided us with an in-depth understanding of how the students (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) connected with the teachings that were shared.

Checking: We understood the readiness of the staff to embark on this project and the trust was in place to take on a project of this level, as well, it required a great deal of support from the District and Board leaders. Within our staff, we were pulling together the shared understanding and commitment to strengthening the quality of the educational experience and opportunities for all students. Now that we have this foundation in place, our staff is really excited to move forward and respond to upcoming student needs and voices that emerge. Through this project, we have noticed that more positive relationship building is happening between our Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, both with students and adults in our school. Some examples include but are not excluded to:

- A French Immersion class inviting SENĆOŦEN students to their class to help teach them the language.
- Conversations in the local stores and businesses between non-Aboriginal people about the canoe project.
- Social media connections from parents
- Spontaneous composition of music connected to the canoe project (with SENĆOŦEN students and with a non-Indigenous teacher)

- Concept of “What is Culture?” film production with our SENĆOŦEN students paralleled the canoe project process

As well, Bayside staff voted for the canoe project to win the Legacy Award for the school for 2014-15. This award is based on an “individual or group achievement, which best depicts the goals of Bayside Middle School; and is an activity or accomplishment that leaves a lasting legacy. The award is recognized with a trophy with name on it; banner in gym; and certificate.” Having the staff choose the canoe project as the recipient for the Legacy Award is a success as they see the value and importance of bringing our school community together in a unique way that increased physical activity, had students learn more about their local environment, and at the same time, helped us to work towards two of the goals in our Education Enhancement Agreement. Because the canoe project received this award, it will help with extending the benefits of it to future years of students.

Another positive outcome is that the District has highlighted our canoe project on the District website under the section of innovative practices and the documentary film will be completed in the fall. This film will then be used to continue embedding Indigenous content into classrooms.

As well, an amazing spinoff that happened as a result of this project was that a very musically gifted Grade 6 teacher at Bayside wrote an incredible song that he called, “Pull Together” (The Canoe Song), as a tribute to this project and of our motto “We all pull together”. This was a wonderful addition to the project and will be part of its legacy.

Reflections/Advice: Implementing a school-wide cultural project has incredible benefits but also challenges. The complexity of coordinating 30 staff members, 562 students, and community members was challenging at points in order to meet everyone's needs as effectively as possible. In future, we would try to enlist a small committee of individuals (perhaps from each grade group) from the beginning to help with organizing and implementing the project.

Think outside of the box. Consider the otherwise. Listen carefully to community. Keep an open heart and mind. Be willing to take a risk. See change as an opportunity. Always focus on student needs and reflections.