

## 2014 - 2015 AESN Case Study



**School:** Bayview Elementary    **District:** #68 Nanaimo Ladysmith

**Area of Focus:** Enhancement Agreement

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**Our focus for this year:** “Will expanding on the information gained through our We Are All Related project and presenting a collection of Bayview Family Fun Facts reinforce and increase indigenous knowledge, understanding and awareness of our staff, students, and families?”

**Scanning:** Each of our inquiry projects of the past four years have evolved from reflections and knowledge gained from our previous projects. With last year’s AESN ‘We Are All Related Project’, we noticed more of our families were engaged and involved at the school. We had more families attend parent teacher interviews, more phone calls from parents, more parents chatting with staff and sharing information and stories, and more involvement of parents with our Shawl Dancing and Drumming group (parents volunteering to come in and make shawls with their children, parents volunteering to help at practice, a dad volunteering to help with the drummers). It feels like we are gaining the trust of our families and students.

We have noticed more students talking to adults about where they are from with pride. All staff were involved in the project and there were many opportunities to make 1:1 connections with family members, as well as our students. Staff are asking questions and making connections to where students are from in their conversations with students. More students are also stopping by the Aboriginal Education room.

With this year’s inquiry, we wanted to find ways to expand on the knowledge gained last year and demonstrate to our students and families that we did not forget and we want to share with the entire school. We wanted to be sure to continue to encompass these OECD principles of learning and the First Peoples Principles of Learning:

*Learners at the centre (OECD)* - focusing on the individual learner and giving each student an opportunity to share about themselves in many different contexts (i.e. where they are from, how they celebrate, the languages they know, the food they eat).

*Emotions are integral to learning (OECD)* - our staff recognize the importance of building a relationship with our students and how their emotions greatly affect their ability to attend and to learn. We chose to continue with a project that gave staff lots of opportunity to build relationships and connect with each student, creating an opportunity for those emotions to be shared.

*Recognizing individual differences (OECD)* – focusing on how not only are they very different from their peers but how there are many similarities between nations and cultures.

*Learning recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge (FPPL)* - we continue to increase our knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal history and indigenous understandings.

*Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story (FPPL)* - this project supported our families and community members as our greatest teachers. There were many opportunities for them to share their memories, stories and history first hand.

*Learning requires exploration of one's identity (FPPL)* - we continue to provide opportunity for our students and families to explore and share their heritage.

**Focus:** Relationships are integral to learning. We recognize the importance of our families in the success of our students. We want students and families to know that we are continuing to honour where they come from and that it is important for us to know and understand. We want to support families in building capacity and knowledge and reconnecting with their roots. We want staff to continue to develop collective ownership and understanding of the importance of an Aboriginal student's background in defining who they are. We want our students to have a deeper understanding of where they are from and how that impacts who they are.

**Hunch:** One-to-one interactions are so important in building relationships with our Aboriginal students and families. In the fast-paced busyness of school, we need to slow down and connect at a deeper level. We want our students' sense of place, identity, and belonging to be nurtured, celebrated, and made stronger. We continue to build on the collective ownership of our staff by increasing awareness, knowledge and understanding of the diverse backgrounds of our students and families and how, in turn, this builds a broader sense of belonging and pride. Many families have experienced a disconnection to their roots through colonization and we think we will continue to build trust through acknowledging the importance of ones' roots.

**New professional learning:** We built the knowledge and capacity of all of our staff by sharing these words/facts and information over 14 weeks. We also continued to build on our connections within the community by reaching out to various agencies and bringing in different guest speakers such as Elder Sally Williams (Kwakwakawakw), Connie Kulhavey (Metis), Michael Kusugak (Inuit), Paul Seward (Snuneymuxw)...some of these community members are our greatest teachers.

A lot of our learning this year came from family members or students as they shared what they know about their heritage either through conversations that were had or artifacts that were shared...our students and families are also our greatest teachers.

To further the professional learning and get the most out of this project, we found it important to have easily accessible professional resources that supported the word of the week. This was a challenge due to the lack of easily accessible resources that were precise and quickly read to suit the time that teachers had to read these resources.

**Taking action:** We created a Bayview Family Fun Facts binder that drew from information we gained during last year's inquiry, the We Are All Related Project (family heritage project). Each week we chose one word to focus on and created four or five facts that gave students//staff more information about that word. The word was shared at Monday morning gathering and one fact was read each day on the announcements. Teachers were then given resources to support the word of the week so they could further extend students' learning in the classroom at a grade appropriate level. Guest speakers were arranged too. Each week, students were required to find one of the Aboriginal Education staff members to tell us the word and they would then receive their ticket towards the draw for a prize. Having students come find our Aboriginal Education staff gave us the opportunity to have one-to-one conversations with that student to ensure their understanding as well as to connect with them about their heritage/stories.

Again, a focus for us is to build relationships with our families so we created a family sheet that went home weekly. If students shared the information with their family they could bring it back and would receive two more tickets towards the draw. Sending this information home also helped us build the capacity/understanding/knowledge of our families.

Since our population is roughly 70% and this project was led by our Aboriginal Education team, our focus was on building Aboriginal Understandings while trying to include all students within the school (30% that are not Aboriginal). To accomplish this, we would choose a word for the week such as Hul'qumi'num and then create the four to five facts using all the different language groups our students were connected to - such as Arabic, Korean, Japanese, Nuuchahnulth, Kwakwala...

We are happy to share copies of our initial information sheet, Weekly Fun Facts and weekly Family Sheets with any interested schools.

**Checking:** Our evidence of growth was based on intense observations from teachers and support staff in three main areas:

1. We will know we are making a difference if more students can speak about where they are from and make connections to how this impacts them.
2. We will know we are making a difference if our family involvement continues to increase in our school.
3. We will know we are making a difference if our staff is able to realize the value of knowing this information and how important it is to our students and families.

Here is a summary of some of our observations:

-Pride and confidence students showed when the Word of the Week was connected to them.  
-Sharing from families, whether it be a quick note that came back on the Family Sheet, a language book, a flag, an artifact, a family treasure. Throughout the 14 weeks, families shared a piece of their story in many different ways. We received a treasured eagle feather, a Cowichan Sweater and a basket woven by a great-great grandmother, we received a mask carved by a great-grandfather and soapstone carvings. We received a flag and a photo collage. We received two older language books from two different families. Families would come into the school and see something on display and then bring in their own artifacts.

-The sharing from students - one student taught the Aboriginal Support Teacher and a handful of other Nuuchahnulth students how to count to 10 in their language. Some students went on the announcements to share their traditional language. Some students connected with other students that were from the same territory sharing different information. Some students shared information at our Monday morning gathering.

-We noticed that the majority of the participation came from the students in grades one through four.

-We had a huge increase in our numbers for the Shawl Dancing and Drumming group and even more of an increase in parent participation (e.g. learning to make cedar headbands then helping the dancers and drummers make them, drumming with the group, helping make shawls/vests, driving for and/or attending performances)

-We had lots of family involvement in our wrap up celebration that included four stations with a cultural focus and a potluck luncheon.

- We also noticed that the more the classroom teacher talked about the Word of the Week in the classroom and extended the learning, either through picture books, various activities, Talking Circle, video clips, or simple conversation the greater the students' participation was.

-Staff are speaking with more understanding about the importance of place and knowing where the students are from as well as sharing information students or families have shared with them.

**Reflections/Advice:** This inquiry built on our work from last year and continued to give our students and families an opportunity to really connect with where they are from and learn a bit more about their history. It also gave parents/guardians the opportunity to share more of their families' histories and through all of this continued to help us in building stronger connections with our students and families!

Some of our challenges were:

1. Having connected resources to each Word of the Week so teachers could extend learning in the classroom at an age appropriate level. At times, this was challenging for a variety of reasons i.e. lack of time, lack of resources easily available, lack of age appropriate resources... It was helpful having support from our District Aboriginal Education staff who would assist by searching for useful resources. This was also a challenge with professional resources as mentioned earlier.

2. The majority of our participation was in grades 1-4. Having the upper Intermediates take a lead role by choosing the words, creating the facts, and/or creating the bulletin boards may have increased their participation. Having enticing prizes did help with this but not as much as we would have liked.

At this point, we are unsure where we will go next year. Some staff have expressed an interest in creating a family cookbook or exploring the history of Residential School. Building understanding around Aboriginal history and continuing to build relationships with students and families will remain a priority next year. A discussion in September with the whole staff will help provide us with direction.