



2014-2015 AESN Case Study

School: Manoah Steves Elementary **District:** #38 Richmond

Area of Focus: Enhancement Agreement

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Our focus for this year: Playful Storytelling incorporating the First Peoples Principles of Learning

Scanning: The students at Manoah Steves are engaged in a historical event this year – the 50th Anniversary of their school. Because of this, the staff and students have an increased awareness of the shared history of the place where their school is and have a strong connection to community and place. Our district’s increased emphasis on the importance of the First Peoples Principles of Learning and our AEEA goal (#2) of having all of our students being aware of our local Aboriginal communities and culture has inspired teachers at the school to engage in projects with an Aboriginal focus. As the primary teachers engaged in scanning their learners, they noted that their students needed more storytelling and more connection to the indigenous ways of knowing.

Focus: The focus of this project’s inquiry is on the role of playful storytelling experiences play in developing oral language as well as more broadly, developing literacy and awareness around the power of story. The teachers at Manoah Steves have chosen to focus specifically on the broad themes of community and place.

Hunch: The teachers involved in this project asked to be involved as they were curious about new pedagogies for enhancing their students’ thinking and learning and ways to weave the First Peoples Principles of Learning throughout their classroom program. As described in the “Scanning” section, the impetus for this inquiry was based on both school and district-based initiatives and support.

New professional learning: The teachers involved in this project are supported by Janice Novakowski during monthly visits to the school where the teachers collaborate on a classroom storytelling experience and then meet to discuss what their current professional curiosities are and what they are noticing in their classrooms. One practice that transformed the classroom environment was the concept of the circle and having the students sit in a circle for class

gathering shifted the dynamic in the classroom. At the district level, the teachers involved in this project come together twice a year for a sharing circle and a professional learning piece to provide background information and inspiration to further their school-based inquiries. Professional resources, articles and materials are provided to the teachers to support their work in this project. A significant event for the Steves teachers in this project was their attendance at the Musqueam Language Professional Development Day on March 6 at the Musqueam Cultural Centre. The teachers were inspired and transformed by listening to Musqueam elder Larry Grant share the story of his people and their language. This led to a renewed focus on the connection of language to place, story and culture.

Taking action: The teachers and students engaged in regular storytelling experiences in their classrooms with opportunities for students to share their stories, often using iPad technology to capture their oral stories. The teachers shared stories from this project on twitter, reaching out to their students' parents and to the broader community. The teachers attended a professional development day at the Musqueam Cultural Centre in March and shared their learning with their students. For the school's 50th Anniversary, the teachers created interactive displays in their classrooms connected to this project, including a beaded timeline showing the long history of Musqueam territory.



The teachers shared their professional and classroom experiences at a sharing circle for the broader district project at the end of April. The two classes also had a visit from local Elder Roberta Price. She spoke to the students about the importance of the circle, how to be respectful (for example, waiting for everyone to arrive to start), the talking stick, storytelling, the importance of sharing only when given permission and the importance of sharing a teaching. She also came to open the 50th assembly.

In celebration of National Aboriginal Day, we invited Alice Guss of the Squamish Nation to visit the two classes at Steves to share her knowledge of cedar harvesting and weaving, drumming and stories with the students. The students were excited to weave with cedar and create a bookmark.

Checking: We used a variety of methods to make the students' (and our own) learning visible – through photo and audio documentation, sharing with parents and the community via class accounts on Twitter and blog posts. Capturing students' narratives and looking at growth in language and thematic content over time was an inherent part of the project. The teachers observed and noted a significant increase in students' sense of story and associated language development. Also of significance is the students' increased awareness of local Aboriginal culture and a sense of shared history of the place where they live and go to school as demonstrated through their stories and class discussions.

At the beginning of the project, we asked the students what they knew and thought about stories and their responses were limited and often referred to books. The teachers collected statements from the students in June about story and the following are some of the K-2 students' statements:

"Is something that you tell. Sometimes it is real and sometimes it is made up."

"Is something that you tell people about so they know about First Nations and they learn about other stuff too."

"Is walking around in the forest because that's how you make a story."

"Is something that you make to share with other people so that you can teach them things."

"Is a thing that you tell people to share your imagination."

"Makes me feel good."

"Is something you build with animals and people."

"You can make up your own story and your friends can make it with you."

The students' statements about story suggest an emerging understanding of the potential purposes of story and that stories can be created orally and by creating with materials.

Reflections/Advice: Four significant learnings from this inquiry include:

- 1) the importance of the circle and its impact on the classroom dynamic and environment
- 2) the power of story to include all students and to develop a strong self-identity inspired by the notion that we all have stories to tell
- 3) connecting to community
- 4) developing a sense of place was a significant theme throughout this inquiry and was accentuated by working with natural materials from the local environment, the teachers' transformed thinking after hearing a Musqueam elder speak and a connection to the shared history of place in response to the school's 50th anniversary

The school team plans to continue with the storytelling project for the next school year and may act as mentors to other teachers who are interested in the this type of project as we grow and nurture playful storytelling within our district. The teachers involved felt narrowing the focus by choosing one or two of the First Peoples Principles of Learning to develop their project around would be helpful to other schools who might be starting a similar project.