



2014-2015 AESN Case Study

School: Nala'atsi **District:** #71 Comox Valley

Area of Focus: Enhancement Agreement

Inquiry Team Members: Toresa Crawford and Elders from the Wachiay Friendship Centre

Our focus for this year: Students in alternate and Elders and other Aboriginal community members often feel isolated. How can we bring these groups of people together to form positive connections while using The First Peoples Principles of Learning as our guide?

Scanning: Up to when they come to our program, many of our students have very few positive connections with Aboriginal role models. As that is one of the principles on the First Peoples Principles of Learning poster that hangs in our classroom, we felt that it might be a perfect opportunity to match those students up with our local Friendship Centre group of 50+ Aboriginal Elders who are positive role models. It was important to take into consideration that this might be difficult as some of our students were reluctant to engage with the Elders, and some of the Elders did not have positive connections with students.

Focus: In the past, we found that students who had positive connections with the Elders often had a better sense of who they are. They were more comfortable doing cultural activities and looked forward to doing activities with our local group of Elders many of who wanted to share their rich and diverse experiences with our students.

Hunch: We like to use the famous quote, "It takes a whole village to raise a child." as a way to explain our approach. It is difficult for two teachers to meet the needs of students especially in an alternate program. Surrounding the students with Elders and other community members who are positive role models provided a much needed support system for our students while providing everyone with interesting activities, many having a cultural theme.

New professional learning: We feel that we must have done something right this year, as we have been asked to do a similar program with our students and Elders again next year. Having the First Peoples Principles of Learning poster prominently posted on the walls of the classroom serves as a reminder as to what we are trying to achieve with our activities. Half way through January, we started our cultural activity with a 10-15 minute conversation about a topic of interest. We called these conversations our RED talks and we used books and articles that we thought might be of interest to our group. We discussed topics that ranged from Residential School, Indigenous Plants, Teachings of the Medicine Wheel and the importance of storytelling. We also read passages from a number of novels; *One Native Life* by Richard Wagamese and *A*

Short History of Indians in Canada by Thomas King were particular favorites with our group. Although these brief chats were only supposed to last 5-10 minutes they often provided heated topics of conversation that lasted throughout that day's activity.

Taking action: We started the school year with a very simple activity. Every Wednesday, we went over to the Friendship Centre and served lunch to the 50+ Elders and community members. As well as visiting with these Aboriginal role models, the students performed a service by helping with the preparing, serving and clearing of the lunch. We then added a cultural afternoon into our schedule. One afternoon a week, the Elders and community members came to the school to participate in a cultural event. Usually 8 to 10 Elders and community members came every week, and gradually the participants became familiar with each other as they worked on their craft or listened to the guest speaker. We found that having a nutrition break halfway through the event gave us even more time to share ideas and relax over a cup of tea. We finally added our 10-15 minute RED talks that were a way of providing an introduction into the planned activity for the day.

Checking: In June 2015, we met with the entire group and discussed the previous year's activities and suggestions for what the group wanted to do the following year. Planning ahead allowed the teachers to have more time to organize the activities, and also for the group to anticipate some of the more popular activities. We have already got over 30 people signed up for the Mask Activity even though half of the participants had done it the previous year!

Reflections/Advice: We will continue to attend the Elder's Lunch next year with our students and share this valuable time with the Elders and community members. By having a plan of next year's activities in place, we hope our activities will run more smoothly! We are working on topics for our RED talks as we found them to be an excellent way to introduce our main cultural activity. We have been given a larger food budget and plan to have Elders and students take turns making the snacks for the days when we have our events. We will also continually ask for ideas from the participants as to what they would like to see us offer in the way of activities. We feel that by doing these activities we are following the true spirit of The Principles of Learning - we connect and encourage the formation of positive relationships, we recognize the role of indigenous knowledge, we involve generations and we explore our identity through enjoyable activities and presentations.