



2014 - 2015 AESN Case Study

School: Conrad Elementary **District:** #52 Prince Rupert

Area of Focus: Transitions

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Our focus for this year: We wished to offer our Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal students a learning opportunity structured by the BC Heritage Fair, that would grow from their personal interests, heritage, culture and family. We planned to explicitly teach research and communication skills, and to encourage students to reflect on The First Peoples Principles of Learning throughout the process.

We wanted to know if this would enhance curiosity, confidence, pride and a desire to learn. If so we hoped students would continue to build on their confidence and desire to learn, and use their unique learning skills as they transition into their next grade /middle school.

Scanning: We wanted to find a way to support students who find it difficult to engage and make connections to the way we have approached learning when we try to “cover” content outlined in the BC Curriculum within distinctly separated subject areas.

We were guided by the OECD Principles of Learning, First Peoples Principles of Learning and the Core Competencies of the new curriculum: Positive Personal Cultural Identity, Critical and Creative Thinking and Communication Skills and the BC Heritage Fair mandate. All frame growth and learning as a holistic “ecological system” that connects personal identity and interests, community and place, growth of the heart/mind/spirit with support from others, along with self-reflection/assessment.

Focus: We hoped to find a way for students to demonstrate passion and interest in what they learn, and show pride and confidence when sharing with their peers, the school and community. We decided to connect our children’s heritage, culture and families to Social Studies (geography, history of our area) and Language Arts (reading, writing, speaking and listening) curriculum using the BC Heritage Fair. We emphasized the importance of including Aboriginal history and culture in each project, and provided learning experiences with a visiting Aboriginal middle school student, an Aboriginal Role Model, our school Aboriginal Family Resource Worker, and a tour of the local museum.

Hunch: It was important to have students come up with their own research topic. We knew that emotion guides motivation and therefore learning: a joining of the heart, mind and spirit. In turn confidence and skills are more likely to strengthen, which would support these students through this project their next grade and/ or the middle school transition.

We felt that the BC Heritage Fair would provide students the structure to develop their individual topics. This would include hands-on learning that develops research, thinking and communication skills. Connections created with family and culture would deepen inter-generational dialogue and provide an opportunity to celebrate the diverse culture and heritage in our school /community. By presenting a display, students would have a vehicle to share their voice through stories, research and creativity. We hoped that the BC Heritage Fair would provide motivation while developing a quest for knowledge, a stronger sense of self and community, and thinking and communication skills that would follow them through to middle school and the transition.

New Professional Learning: We were guided by many different frameworks and principles, which all wove together into an ecological holistic whole which gave structure the learning

BC Heritage Fair Project (link: www.bcheritagefairs.ca)

- to support and structure holistic learning that connects to the school and wider communities
- to include Ts'msyen history and perspective, with support from Aboriginal Education Department's Role Models, Aboriginal Family Resource Worker and Helping Teacher

First Peoples Principles of Learning (<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/documents.htm#fppol>)

- to guide us more deeply in connecting a sense of time (history) within the same place (geography)
 - to support the well-being of our students self, community, land, spirits and ancestors
 - to encourage our students explore their own identity
 - to ensure that learning is holistic, reflective, experiential, and relational
 - to recognize the consequences of ones actions throughout the project
 - to involve generational roles and responsibilities
 - to ensure that learning is embedded in memory, history and story
 - to understand and demonstrate that it takes patience and time during the learning

OECD 7 Principles of Learning:

(<http://www.oecd.org/edu/cei/thenatureoflearningusingresearchtoinspirepractice.htm>)

- to provide a framework for teachers to refer to and reflect upon provided a greater awareness of how we approached teaching for the short and long term
- Learners at the Centre, Social Nature of Learning, Emotions are Integral to Learning, Recognize Individual Differences, Strengthening All Students, Assessment FOR Learning and Building Horizontal Connections

Differentiation:

- to support a project that is shaped by each students' interests, heritage, knowledge and skills

- to provide differentiated support depending on each student's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Resources:

The Differentiated School: Making Revolutionary Changes in Teaching and Learning (Tomlinson, C.A., Brimijoin, K., Narvaez, L.)

Differentiation in Practice: Resource Guide for Differentiating Curriculum (Tomlinson, C.A., Cunningham Eidson C.)

Start Where They Are: Differentiating for Success with the Young Adolescent (Hume, Karen)

Tuned Out: Engaging the 21 st Century Learner (Hume, K.)

Excellence in Writing:

- to build student research (primary and secondary) and writing skills

Taking action:

1) Setting the Scene: Exploring Personal Identity and Heritage

Our team of three worked with a group of 17 students grade 4/ 5 who come from a range of cultural and social backgrounds. Initial teacher led activities were created to develop prior knowledge by connecting our students with their heritage, culture and family stories. Students enjoyed the "Setting the Scene" activities (Heritage Bag, Student Timeline, Family Tree) and many commented on the fact that they learned more about themselves, their family and their culture. Students demonstrated confidence and pride in the fact that they all wanted to share their findings about their family and culture.

2) Setting the Scene 2: Exploring Time and Place using a Pictorial Time Line of the Area

We used a pictorial timeline and digital pictures of the local area, to provide students a historical lens and sense of Continuity and Change. We know that history can be a difficult subject to grasp, but at least we could focus on one place (Ts'msyen Territory) and how it has changed and stayed the same. Students were asked to include First Nations history, and support was provided through print resources, a visit to the museum and visits from an Aboriginal Role model, former student now in middle school and the Aboriginal Family Resource Worker.

3) Research: Primary (personal connections and people) and Secondary (print)

Teachers modeled each activity (outlined on a Criteria Page) from Heritage Bags to note-taking, interviewing, paragraph writing, writing a bibliography, creating a visual display and presenting orally. All students were independent when they wrote paragraphs based on their personal heritage or family (Heritage Bag and Family Interview questions), but when it came to book information, this divided the more capable students from the struggling students. Students were stretched the most when working with Secondary resources (note taking and paragraph writing).

4) Moving within each students' the Proximal Zone of Development

Teachers respected each child's choice of topic and made an effort to support the child with their learning. We were aware that each student comes with a different Zone of Proximal Development and therefore would require different levels of support, coaching or scaffolding. They all needed to be stretched. Teachers did their best to support students with the finding of resources (library books, website information, text books, interviewees in the community), and

sometimes had to rewrite information into simpler paragraphs (based on a need for readability). Most student feedback asked for more resources that were easier to read, with fewer long complicated words that students did not know.

Some students were able to research and write paragraphs with a bit of coaching while others required explicit teaching. As teachers we were continually adjusting our support, being aware of the fine balance between student direction and adult scaffolding. Weekly teacher planning meetings and daily connecting were dynamic and focused due to the varied needs that we strived to support.

All students moved forward with their understanding and skills on how to complete a research project from start to finish. Some were able to complete the project independently with some checking and coaching, while others will continue to need support.

5) Learning Outside the Classroom

A special tour of the Museum of Northern British Columbia was created so that students could connect their research to the Aboriginal history of the area. Our guide spoke specifically to each student topic. Students were asked to add their learning to their research notes. Students toured The North Pacific Cannery Museum on the day of the Heritage Fair. Most had not been there before.

6) Compiling Learning into a Creative Display

All students put their 5 paragraphs, maps, images, bibliography and titles onto large stand-up display boards, embellishing their presentation with coloured borders and hand drawn or cut images and 3 included original acrylic paintings completed in art class. Digital presentations were not used since the location of the Heritage Fair was in the North Pacific Cannery museum which offered no electricity and weak acoustics. Students brought in their own personal touches with a variety of artifacts to add to their tables (models, artifacts, photos from home) and some dressed up to reflect their learning and or culture.

7) Presenting to the School and Outside Community using the BC Heritage Fair Format

Students were nervous at first but excited about this opportunity to leave school for the day and be part of a huge fair. Students used the words scared, exciting, fun and interesting to describe their feelings at the Heritage Fair. Each student had their display board, rough drafts and props to display on tables at school, and later at the North Pacific Cannery Museum. A few students were uncomfortable presenting their work in public, some saying they wanted to do more to their display while others were nervous about speaking and answering questions. For these students anxiety was amplified presenting to the community compared to presenting at school. On the other hand the more social/verbal students were in their glory and loved explaining their learning. Oral speaking is an important component of the Heritage Fair. We did teach and practice responding to questions asked by students, teachers and judges. Students then had a real life opportunity to share their voice.

8) Students Reflected Upon their Learning

Students were asked to reflect upon their past and future learning using a questionnaire: Reflections on Heritage Fair Projects, and individual and group interview sessions. The questions reflected our NOII/AESN Transitions Inquiry.

Checking: We feel that we did make a difference, and celebrate our learning and student learning. We did use the Social Studies IRPs for grade 4 and 5 and the Writing Performance

Standards, and reported on them in our final report cards. However, we wish to celebrate our student and teacher learning by sharing student reflections about the project.

Student Reflections:

My project centered around my personal interests, heritage culture and family.

- “Art and carving are connected to me because my grandpa was a carver.”
- “I choose weaving because I know how to do it and wanted to learn more about it.”
- “I was brought up in the fishing industry and my project is about fishing.”
- “Firefighting because my dad is a firefighter.”
- “I strongly agree because my papa is a gold miner and I like to gold mine too.”
- “My dad fishes and I would like to learn about what he does.”
- “I agree because my dad and grandfather crab fish, and my project was about crab fishing.”

I feel a passion in what I learned about history, and how it relates to my interests.

- “I was excited because I wanted to share what I know with others.”
- “I would like to do it again. It felt like high school.”
- “I feel grateful for learning about something I knew nothing about, but wanted to learn more.”
- “I loved learning about my topic and going around and seeing everyone else’s projects.”
- “Yes because I got to learn more about my family because my family beads.”
- “Next time I suggest kids have a flash drive so they can work at home, and at school”.

I learned about the history of our area and about my topic through an Aboriginal Elder.

- “I learned about how to make a net with nettles by Sam Bryant (at the museum).”
- “Mr. Bryant said that the chiefs wore beads on their regalia to represent that they were important”.
- “I agree because they did not value gold back then.”
- “I learned that long ago crab was not served at feasts. It was not as important as salmon.”

I take pride in what I know and want to share it with my peers and the community.

- “I was proud because I want other people to see how I improved on my writing and getting information.”
- “I know I did well when I represented my family work on beading.”
- “I was proud to share my project to the judges.”

I feel confident in my skills as a researcher of history (reading, finding key words/taking notes).

- “The note taking of 3 words was good, because my brain couldn’t remember it, so it helped me.”
- “I know I went deep into my research so now I’m an expert on beadwork.”
- “Yes, because I got lots of facts but my teachers had to help me.”
- “There are some words in the book I don’t know but I love finding key words because they are easier.”

<p>I demonstrated that learning takes time and patience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “If you rush it won’t be good but if you take time it would be perfect.” • “Yes because learning does take patience and time. It also gets frustrating.” • “Yes, you have to be patient when you are learning. You don’t rush, you take your time.” • “I had to learn to be patient with my project.” • “I agree because there are times where you don’t want to work and learning takes time!” • “I put all the effort that took more than a month into a great project.”
<p>I am confident in my skills as an interviewer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I interviewed my dad it was good and long for the recorder because my dad had a lot to say.” • “Yes, because making questions is like taking a hike. You want to get up the mountain but in making questions it is like getting you to the mountain.” • “I liked making questions and asking them but I don’t really agree on recording them because he talked so much.”
<p>I am able to identify my strengths/talents and embrace them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, but sometimes I am not always sure about myself. • I strongly agree because I know how to present and I did. • I feel confident and I feel like I shine. • Yes, because I am good at making the board, asking questions, and presenting. • Yes, because I can identify my strengths as a writer. • My strength is writing and my weakness is decorating.

As seen in some of the student reflections above, we used First Peoples Principles of Learning to guide us more deeply in connecting a sense of time passing (history) within the same place and feel that they were important and positive guides that shaped teacher and student learning

- ✓ Did this project support the well-being of our students self, community, land, spirits and ancestors? Did our students explore their own identity?
- ✓ Was our students learning holistic, reflective, experiential, and relational?
- ✓ Did our students recognize the consequences of ones actions throughout the project?
- ✓ Did our learners involve generational roles and responsibilities?
- ✓ Was our students’ learning embedded in memory, history and story?
- ✓ Did our students demonstrate patience and time to complete their project and experience?

Quotes from student interviews:

“I feel grateful for learning about something I knew nothing about, but wanted to learn more.” SM

“I would like to do it again. It felt like high school.” TN

“I would have liked more time to write. I felt rushed.” TD

“I loved learning about my topic and going around and seeing everyone else’s projects.”

AD

“The note taking of 3 words was good, because my brain couldn’t remember it, so it helped me.”

“We had to wait a long time for the judges, but I got to read my information over and try to remember it all”. Br.

“If there were more books, I would have had more paragraphs. I had too much empty space on my board”. TF

Reflections/Advice: As hoped, participating in the BC Heritage Fair did provide a positive learning opportunity for students to connect their personal interests, heritage and family stories with the big picture of history on the Northwest Coast and the curriculum. Learning was holistic in that students made quality connections with their families and culture, developed research and communication skills and had an opportunity to creatively present their learning to the community. Proof is in the pudding, in that all three of us plan to “do” the Heritage Fair again, and students said they would undoubtedly do another Heritage Fair.

What We Learned:

- 1) A full package went home with covering letter about project, goals, and a criteria sheet but next time we would make a huge effort to invite parents into the school to help with topic choice, research and ideas for the display. The parents who did come in to the school to share their perspectives showed us the richness of this lost opportunity.
- 2) A Ts’msyen role model visited to answer specific questions from students. Next time we would like to engage our Aboriginal Family Resource worker who is regularly in the school to move around and talk one on one to each student about their topic throughout the learning. This would make the project far deeper, embedding Aboriginal knowledge and perspective into learning throughout.
- 3) Readability of resources was a concern. We need to find ways to support students who are not reading at grade level. The way we got around this was to rewrite articles for students. This was very time intensive, but perhaps reality, when students are choosing their own topics.
- 4) When content was more personal, students were more independent and writing was of higher quality. However students do need to learn from Secondary Resources, so we need to persist, even if this is harder to do.
- 5) Learning is a social process. We asked students to pursue their own interests. While this supported individualism, students worked on separate projects. We would like to find a way where students can meld their interests into one project to encourage more social learning.