

## 2014 - 2015 AESN Case Study

**School:** Marlborough Elementary **District:** #41 Burnaby

**Area of Focus:** Transitions

**Inquiry Team Members:** Alison Johnson

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**Scanning**: I had a Grade 3 class at Marlborough Elementary with diverse cultural backgrounds – Romanian, Iranian, Chinese, Arabic, Serbian, Israeli, Filipino, Nigerian, Irish, and Russian. From a class of 24, 3 students were born in Canada – 2 being First Nations – Cree and Nisga'a. Fifteen students were first generation Canadians and the remaining 6 were not yet Canadian citizens. Most of the families were newer to Canada and had an emerging knowledge of Aboriginal history, traditions, and cultures, Canadian history, Community Connectedness and Belonging – Enhancement Agreement Goal Statement.

**Focus**: The focus was on the First People's Principle of Learning around "learning ultimately supports the well-being of self, family, the community, the land, the spirits and the ancestors." Classroom activities incorporated Aboriginal protocols to start the day and end the day. Reading Good Morning/Night World and sitting in our thankfulness circle to start each day and closing circle to end the day (right palms down –respecting mother earth and all inhabitants and left palms up- respecting grandfather sky and our ancestors) giving our Morning and Day thankfulness as well as embedding Aboriginal literature, music, poetry, song, games, and beliefs through curriculum and classroom beliefs and values.

**Hunch**: As previously mentioned the students in this classroom were newer to Canada and had an emergent/beginning understanding of Canada and history and perspectives of Canada's Indigenous Peoples. Along with increasing all students' understanding, I felt that a focus on Aboriginal perspective would increase my two students of Aboriginal ancestry's sense of self pride, leadership, and connection to the learning environment. I also felt that within our school, there was little teaching of Aboriginal perspective. In a school with a large newcomer population, I believe it is critical that all students have increased knowledge and understanding of the history and perspectives of Canada's Indigenous Peoples. I knew that by increasing the visible presence of Aboriginal peoples and culture within the classroom and sharing our learnings with other classes, I would facilitate a greater sense of belonging, confidence, pride in culture, and importance for my Aboriginal students, while at the same time, increase the knowledge base regarding Aboriginal culture and history for our non-Aboriginal students,

allowing our non-Aboriginal students a chance to gain understanding and appreciation for Aboriginal culture.

## **New professional learning:**

- Investigation of First People's Principles of Learning and their application to the classroom.
- Investigation of Burnaby District's Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement Community Connectedness and Belonging, Culture and Sense of Self, and Student Achievement.
- Would using reading materials with Aboriginal Content have a positive impact on the reading abilities of Aboriginal students?
- Would celebrating Aboriginal culture through reflective and reflexive practices increase positive attitudes and support an enhanced understanding towards Aboriginal peoples?

## Taking action:

Colleagues - Shared learnings, understandings, and knowledge during staff meetings and Professional Learning days, and had my students present in a variety of ways their learnings, understandings, and knowledge to other classes in the school.

Inquiry team – Met regularly with elders Roberta Price and Cease Wyss, Tracy Healy Burnaby District Aboriginal contact teacher, Terri Mack from Strong Nations, Trudi Harris Aboriginal Education Cultural Coordinator, Vancouver District, and the Burnaby District Stronger Together Aboriginal Education Inquiry Team throughout the year.

- Developed our understanding of the Medicine Wheel by using "THE CIRCLE OF COURAGE" as our classroom's beliefs based on Martin Brokenleg's Reclaiming Youth at Risk model, which outlines the four essential elements every child needs in order to flourish and thrive: belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. Therefore, correcting negative behavior by stating, "Are you showing the Spirit of Independence" and encouraging the student, to refer to the class generated criteria and state, "I should have ....". See attached. We also further developed our understanding of the Medicine Wheel by using Terri Mack's books, "We Greet the Four Animals" and "We Greet the Four Seasons".
- Read The Absolutely True Story of a Part-Time Indian by Sherman Alexie, Shi-shi-etko by Nicola Campbell, Fatty Legs and A Stranger at Home by Christy Jordan Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton, Tilly-A Story of Hope and Resilience by Monique Gray Smith, The Inconvenient Indian, and Medicine River by Thomas King.
- Utilized learnings from elder Roberta Price:
  - Read "Good Morning World", daily and then each member of our classroom community gave a blessing or thankfulness for the previous night or morning. We did this by sitting in a circle, joining hands, with our right palms down symbolizing Mother Earth and all the inhabitants of our world- people, animals, fish, trees and our left palms up symbolizing Father Sky and our ancestors.

- ❖ At the end of each day one student read "Goodnight World" and again each member of our classroom community offered a blessing or thankfulness for the day.
- ❖ Each day read Respect poem and learnings to remind us. See attached.
- ❖ Developed learnings and understandings from a blessing. See attached.
- Read The Totem Tale to begin developing our understanding of the importance and symbolism of animals - <u>frog</u>, <u>beaver</u>, <u>eagle</u>, <u>bear</u>, <u>wolf</u>, and <u>raven</u>.
- Used puppets, to create, share, and present a play to demonstrate our understandings of the Coast Salish animal symbolism with all primary classes (23 classes). The kids chose their own animal and wrote their own lines. See attached.
- Used STRONG NATIONS READERS for guided reading groups and shared the cultural connection with other students in the other grade 2/3 classrooms (5 classes) while demonstrating their reading capabilities.
- Used RAVEN TALES to develop our understandings of the special significance of celestial objects for Aboriginal peoples and shared our learnings with all the k and grade 1 classes (8 classes) using technology-Power Points, Comic Life Programs, Puppet Pals, and Wordle and art.
- With the support from district contact teacher Tracy Healy, developed our ability to
  identify indigenous plants and our understanding of the teachings about traditional uses
  of these plants for food and/or medicine. Shared our plant medicine learnings with
  other classes and shared the process/steps involved in harvesting Cottonwood Buds to
  make salve during Student Leds and "gifted" the salve to our families. See attached.
- With the students participating in the Aboriginal Circle Program facilitated and supported sharing their song and dance from the resource "Take a Walk" with classes chosen by each student involved in the program (15 classes) and supported time to practice and rehearse "Woman's Warrior Song" using our drums and rattles created during circle time to perform during the school's last celebration of learning and in front of the student body (1000 people).

**Checking** - Sense of peace, pride and strength in classroom community. Aboriginal students consistently and actively engaged in the classroom experience demonstrating increased academic ability – reading levels intially 2 and 6 to a reading level of 22 and 31. Professionally and personally feeling more comfortable in sharing Aboriginal perspective and teachings with colleagues within my building.

## Reflections/Advice:

- I have registered for the The UBC Faculty of Education Online Course (MOOC) titled Reconciliation Through Indigenous Education that begins on September 29, 2015 to increase my knowledge of how education programs and teaching practices can be modified in order to meaningfully integrate Indigenous knowledge worldviews and pedagogies in classrooms, schools and communities.
- I am continuing to work with Tracy Healy and have joined with another school's professional development to begin our inquiry on Investigation of Burnaby District's

- Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement Community Connectedness and Belonging using acknowledging traditional territory of Coast Salish Nations of Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh, and Squamish as a starting point to develop our understanding of Coast Salish Nations.
- During the first week of school classes will be multiage and rotating thus I will be greeting
  and presenting to 6 classes a lesson based from my learning of the 7 Sacred Teachings the
  Wolf/ Humility. Think of others before yourself, recognize that you are no less or more
  important than anyone else, cooperation.
- I am initiating a reading club using new and previously read Aboriginal Books/resources focusing on Truth and Reconciliation.





