



2015-2016 AESN Case Study

School: AHP Matthew Elementary

District: #36 Surrey

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Our focus for this year: AHP Matthew Elementary students, staff and families would like to honour, promote and sustain Coast Salish cultures and ways of being through the school's story post project.

Scanning: Over the past couple of years, we saw positive changes in both students and staff regarding learning and teaching about Aboriginal history and culture. Specifically, students and staff are becoming more confident about wanting to learn and/or teach more about the Coast Salish ways of being. Our school has demonstrated a huge growth and now beginning to make connections to the First Peoples Principles of Learning Learning in our endeavour to create a positive space not only for Aboriginal students but for ALL students. We now acknowledge and understand that learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place); Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities; Learning recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge; and most importantly at this time (for our school) "*Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.*" Therefore, we believe, our story post project will bring Coast Salish's rich culture and history alive to the young learners of AHP Matthew Elementary School.

Focus: AHP Matthew Elementary School agreed to invite Brandon Gabriel (Kwantlen First Nations artist) to come into the school to teach, demonstrate and share how to connect or weave Kwantlen First Nations (Coast Salish) art and history into the new curriculum. Our overall goal this year was to create a visual and auditory presence within the school. We will be working closely with Brandon Gabriel to help students design and paint the cement structures at our undercover area beginning May 19, 2016. Our main purpose is to assist the staff on where to begin and show how to incorporate Indigenous ways of being and knowledge into the curriculum. We believe that this project will provide teachers and staff ways to infuse Indigenous Knowledge into all subject areas and also compile, collect and share math and science resources with each other, as well as begin creating Aboriginal math and science resources for our school to access

Hunch: Despite the enthusiasm and positive growth of both staff and students for learning about Aboriginal history and culture, we are still finding some staff in our school uncomfortable teaching it and / or for most of the staff, their biggest fear is making mistakes. The sense we get from staff is they are feeling overwhelmed and not knowing where to begin to find authentic resources necessary to teach. The students are very eager to learn about stories (legends) and are excited about the story post project that is about to begin soon.

New professional learning: Our intentions were to bring in the elders to teach us about their specific cultures, go to cultural centers, visit Surrey's Aboriginal Education Department resource center and do online research. We still plan on carrying out our plan for new professional learning but as we have learned, it will take a little more time. Some teachers were able to visit

the Aboriginal Education Department resource center and found it very helpful. As we were well aware, online research is the easiest to access and found many websites and resources to help us with our projects and infusing Aboriginal history and culture into the curriculum. We also invited a workshop facilitator of Aboriginal ancestry to our school on our professional development day. The workshop was very informative and it helped ease the overwhelming feeling of staff.

Taking action: Brandon Gabriel, an artist from Kwantlen First Nation, came to our school to meet the staff and help guide, support and prepare for the story post project. Brandon's initial presentation was to connect with staff and begin building a relationship. He was instrumental in teaching, and demonstrating how to connect or weave Aboriginal art (cultural/traditional) into the western/non-traditional ways of knowing into the curriculum and specifically into math and science. We are now in the process of setting up a schedule to include all staff and students in creating the *four story posts* outside our undercover area of the school. The excitement is building and at the same time, staff is feeling overwhelmed once more. We did expect many emotions to surface due to the new learning at all grades and all levels. So the AHP Matthew Elementary Aboriginal Education Committee (AHP AEC) is doing their best to support staff through this process by ensuring there is open communication (i.e. email, staff meeting presentations, and speaking/supporting individual staff). We are making sure we let staff know what to expect and what to do to help make this project run smoothly. The AHP AEC, students and staff will work together to incorporate Aboriginal content within the school curriculum and culture.

Checking: We will be conducting a poll of students and staff on their knowledge prior to the start and then again after the completion of the project. We will know that we have made a difference through demonstration of staff and students incorporating knowledge in lessons and through conversations. Since the beginning of our inquiry, we have noticed students becoming more familiar with Aboriginal history and culture, interest has piqued, inquiry had been initiated, and an awareness and understanding of Aboriginal culture was and continues to be developed. This was demonstrated in the increased number of students joining the drumming group, more assignments and art about Aboriginal history and culture on bulletin boards and more of a presence in school assemblies.

Reflections/Advice: AHP Matthew Elementary students, staff and community are beginning to understand that building relationships is one of the most important aspects of our project. In order for our school to complete the story posts we must first build a relationship with the artist, the First Nations communities and school communities. It is a task worth investing our time and commitment towards. Intertwined with this lesson/advice, we also learned and acknowledged the meaning of time is also different between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal ways of being. We found that we needed to put much care and emphasis on building the relationships but we are also not to disregard the expectations and timelines of our school calendar (predominantly western ways of being).