



2015-2016 AESN Case Study

School: Arden Elementary

District: #71 Comox Valley

Inquiry Team Members:

Colleen Devlin

Doug David

Gail Martindale

Lynn Swift

Contacts:

Colleen.Devlin@sd71.bc.ca

Doug.David@sd71.bc.ca

Gail.Martindale@sd71.bc.ca

Lynn.Swift@sd71.bc.ca

Our focus for this year: To have children learn about Indian Residential Schools (IRS), through a lens of compassion, that would then lead to action projects.

Scanning: We noticed the young children were quickly able to grasp the concepts of empathy and compassion – with the younger students we used only a few video examples (a bear helping a bird out of water, some pre-school children arguing about weather with one little twin trying to intercede with soothing words and actions, and three books – Shi Shi Etko and Shin-Chi's Canoe by Nicola Campbell and Amik Loves School by Kathereena Vermett. With our thinking / boxing photo strategy the grade ones were able to write simple words or dictate their thoughts and questions to a nearby adult – a great strategy for any age group.

The children asked heart felt questions and were comforted by the fact it happened long ago. Our Elders came in only to share local legends and stories and introduce some language through songs and crafts. The children were happy to know despite going away to school our class Elder was able to learn some of her culture and share it with us (the simple message for the young students), older students worked with Doug David, Lynn Swift and Gail Martindale with deeper messages and a 6-7 lesson unit – but I can only report for what directly happened with my little learners.

This age group quickly wanted to help and let people know their hearts were affected –so we did a number of projects. As you can see in the photo section below this became an accidental year-long focus of being a community of caring / compassionate learners as they wanted to do a new project seemingly each month – actually when we planted bulbs they observed a soup kitchen line up and wanted to help there so we returned the next week with cookies; when the weather turned cold the grade ones thought about our friends in the food line ups and wanted to help again so they asked friends and family for Canadian Tire money.

They involved their big buddy class in the ice cream fund raisers for Fort McMurray when they realized they needed some “big kid” help with line ups and coin counting...but more importantly the older class caught on to their passion and quickly related it to their own learning situation and jumped in whole heartedly. The grade ones also brought this same passion and compassion as we learned about animals – they collected supplies to donate to the North Island Animal Wildlife Refuge Centre and adopted a bear cub that will be released into the wild next fall.

Grandparents and family members learned through their children (especially when asked to help out) and asked for web sites they could visit to learn more. The parents in my class liked the gentle age appropriate way their child learned and were appreciative of learning more deeply themselves. Many were so involved they signed up to drive for a final fieldtrip to join our local National Aboriginal Day 5K walk / run with a salmon BBQ (so we were thrilled with domino actions).

Focus: We wanted to impact our learners and their understanding of the Indian Residential School experience and its lasting effects). Participants used their understanding of compassion to explore evidence of the Residential School experience. We viewed video clips, photographs, and other artefacts, participants were invited to ask questions, make connections, infer, think critically and communicate what they noticed, thought and wondered. The inquiry led to exploring the questions “What is reconciliation?” and “How are reconciliation and compassion linked?” We wanted the students to view the vulnerable people in our valley with a new lens and to also become change makers themselves and be moved into action.

Hunch: As a group we thought we not only needed to change the learning experience for children, we wanted to share our journey with fellow teachers and hoped they would feel comfortable enough to teach about IRS and hopefully find this lens of compassion as a vehicle for those teachings. We were fortunate enough to have our lesson series presentation be accepted into the BC Superintendents’ Conference, FNEESC’s Provincial Conference and the BC School Trustees Spring Provincial Conference.

New professional learning:

- FNEESC Indian Residential Schools and Reconciliation Teacher Resource Guides
- BCTF Project of Heart
- Collaborating with teachers across district
- Survivor stories
- Residential School Videos
- TRC website and recommendations.
- Visit the First Nations Caring Society web site as there are many calls to action (letter writing campaigns for clean water, book drives, paper heart gardens)
- Facilitated student action / inquiry projects that move from this knowledge into projects that show the community that Arden School students care about struggling citizens in our town...see pictures below.





Taking action: Actions taken at Arden School this year as evidenced by this group of photos.

1. Participated in Orange Shirt Day to Honour Residential School survivors – we planted a paper heart garden (grade ones)
2. Planted flower bulbs in a local community garden using First Nations Caring Society idea “planting Memories Honouring Dreams” (grade ones)
3. Gathered winter weather gear using donated Canadian Tire money -walked down to our local soup kitchen to deliver the socks and hats (grade ones)
4. Gathered food hamper items for our own school families in need – (grade 5-6 big buddies)
5. Sold ice cream for Fort McMurray families as so many of our families also affected – parents commute from our valley to jobs in Fort McMurray (grade ones and big buddy class)
6. Another idea from First Nations Caring Society participated in a letter writing campaign for clean water and safe comfy schools in all communities across Canada -- Have a Heart Day combined with Shannen’s Dream (grade ones)



Checking: This was such a rich experience for us as a team, on so many levels. Although I have only written about its impact on my school and my young learners, the district staff (Doug, Lynn and Gail) were able to go into a number of schools and work through the unit with many classes). Travelling as team and learning so much since the decommissioning of St Michael's Residential School, we feel we are almost a family having experienced so many deep emotions and witnessing such unique prayers, community and feelings that has made us quite the unit who can deliver a strongly impactful lesson series. This was our goal to design something that represents the strong way we were affected by the experience and share it with others in a way that changed their way of thinking and learning as well.

Reflections/Advice: We learned a lot and I think the best advice would be to know your students and audience well – do not start this too soon, it is very heartfelt and emotional and you the teacher needs to be able to be there and support the learners. Working with at least one other adult would be very helpful. We have our lesson plan and unit on our school district website (for the older students not the early primary lessons.)
<http://www3.sd71.bc.ca/School/abed/resources/elementaryteacher/Pages/Residential-School-Inquiry.aspx>