



2015-2016 AESN Case Study

School: Bayside Middle School

District: #63 Saanich

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Our focus for this year: Our focus area was literacy development and self-regulation for a small group of Aboriginal students within the context of the whole class.

Scanning: We focused in on a small group of Aboriginal boys who are struggling academically, particularly with reading, writing, and math, to determine what we could do to support their specific learning needs and help them to be successful. We used the four key questions to interview these boys along with the rest of the class. They were not able to identify the big ideas and how those ideas would help direct their learning. We also noticed that they had a hard time staying connected to some of the content in classes because their abilities were well below grade level in these areas.

We wondered if we incorporated the generational learning and storytelling from the First Peoples Principles of Learning would those strategies help to engage these students and stimulate their understanding of how storytelling has been used traditionally to pass along memory, traditional knowledge and values. Our hope was that they would be engaged, and therefore able to learn the format of stories through this oral method which would help them develop their own reading and writing skills. Specifically, we wanted them to be involved in the story writing process of how our school carved a canoe in the previous school year, and their work would be included in a class-wide book project that would be interesting for others to read.

Focus: We were hoping that these students would see the relevance of how their traditional cultural practices are connected to their learning in school today. Oral storytelling is the first step in learning the written story process, so we felt that this would be a good place to start. We hoped their engagement would be increased through this framework, especially because we were bringing in members of their community to help with the process.

Hunch: These students were new to our school this year as they were in grade 6. As a school, we're trying to incorporate more Indigenous learning values and methods into our regular teaching practices to engage our First Nations learners more and to help them to understand how their classroom learning connects them to the value of reading and writing for real life purposes.

New professional learning: We used the Picture Word Induction Method (PWIM) to help connect these learners with text and the context of our story writing. *The Good Garden* book was a model for our writing process. We attended three literacy workshops and one additional workshop with our local literacy district specialist where we used the *Spiral of Inquiry* resource as a guide for our collaborative teamwork. We liaised with our SENĆOŦEN teacher about oral storytelling and involved her in some of the classroom activities. We connected with another colleague about using the online book publishing company, Picaboo. We liaised with three

other classes in the school to include them in the editing process. After publishing the book, we held a book launch and invited people from the community to our school to celebrate and share our learning and accomplishment of completing the book writing process.

Taking action: Through our collaborative efforts, we designed a timeline to complete our project (initially eight weeks). We found that the whole process took longer than we first anticipated (13 weeks) in part due to additional activities that were added to the school calendar. We involved the Teacher-Librarian to pull a variety of storybooks to help the students to learn about and evaluate storybook formats. We set it up so that each of the Indigenous students were paired with non-Indigenous peers to complete their portion of the book. This was designed to foster relationship building between the various groups of students in the class and for the Indigenous students to be in leadership roles. Definitely involving the SENĆOŦEN teacher and a member from the local First Nations community in the process helped boost the engagement of these students to willingly participate in this project. The students were able to see the modeling of collaboration amongst the Indigenous and non-Indigenous adults sparking the ability for them to also engage in a collaborative process with their peers in the class. The Indigenous students could see that their community members valued the learning happening through this writing process.

Checking: Our baseline for the overall assessment of this process was that these boys were relatively disengaged in class before our book project. Throughout the project, there was varying degrees of participation from these students. Various parts of the book writing process connected with the boys differently. For example, one boy who was very reluctant to write, felt empowered to write a very personal story. Another boy thought deeply about the life lessons that were shared by the community member and so he connected most with the oral storytelling. This helped him to understand the power of stories, even in the written format. As well, another boy became much more confident with his oral presentation skills and has volunteered many times since to be a speaker on behalf of the class. A few boys really developed a deep understanding of the writing process overall and were very excited to be a part of sharing their learning at the book launch. There were a couple of others who were still coping with seeing the big picture; however, they showed a sense of pride once they saw the completed published book, and wanted to be part of the celebration even though they didn't want to present in front of the audience.

Reflections/Advice: We learned that working collaboratively, both for the staff and the students, was very powerful to move engagement and learning forward for everyone. By using a story that connected to local Indigenous knowledge and culture, we went from a disconnected group of students to a cohesive group that felt proud of their team accomplishment. This was most apparent when they were able to share their learning process on a few different occasions and especially when they had time to be immersed in reading the book in its published form.

Next, we plan to use what we have learned to potentially write another book with a different group of students during the next school year. We will try to involve the students in the online design of the book. We didn't have time with this book for the students to do that part. Our advice to others would be that if you choose to engage in a book writing process, allow yourself enough time to plan, implement, and publish, then add some additional time, just in case! Despite the large amount of work that it took to complete this task, we feel that it was a very worthwhile project for all involved and it provided a storybook that was written by kids for kids to be enjoyed by future students of our school for years to come.