



2015-2016 AESN Case Study

School: Cilaire Elementary

District: #68 Nanaimo Ladysmith

Inquiry Team Members: Tony Elliott, Darren Dickie, Leila Lattimer, Miss Scott

Our focus for this year was using Aboriginal culture to help engage all students to find their voice - helps counter the negative effects of trauma and unmet needs growing up for all students. Helping students create a strong connection to themselves and the other students in the class using Aboriginal culture in a Talking Circle. Students learned through Aboriginal stories and games.

Scanning: All across Canada the issue is the same, engaging Aboriginal learners with vicarious trauma whose parents went to Residential School. Growing up with parents that are disconnected emotionally, students learn to do the same thing when learning gets hard. Aboriginals have grown up with no voice because of Residential schools.

Focus: After 14 years of playing games with students from grades 3 to 12 in a Talking Circle, I have seen many students lack the confidence to talk in front of the class and are afraid to ask for help from the teacher. My focus is on helping students overcome their fear of talking in front of each other, slowly help push them out of their comfort-zone in a traditional Aboriginal Talking Circle respectfully, and help students find their power and use their voice respectfully.

Hunch: In every class survey, the fear of talking in front of the class is at the top for more than half the students. The last three years I have asked students about their fear of talking in class and it has always been very high. After students do story telling in front of the class their fear has gone up because most students think they can talk in front of the class. Students learn by doing they have fear talking in front of the class. When students' emotional walls are up learning is harder and making friends is also hard too.

New professional learning: The evidence is in the positive behaviors between all students and the higher level of engagement. Students that could not talk at all, could talk in front of the class after all the work in the Talking Circle. Students learned to show respect in the Talking Circle and the Aboriginal protocols of how to act in the circle. All students had their hands on their laps with their hands open with one palm pointing towards the speaker. Students learned how Aboriginals showed support when the speaker was talking and that they are giving and receiving energy with the speaker with their hands. All students could see everyone was supporting them when they were talking.

Taking action: At the end, after all the games and talking circles, I wrote down the student's feedback about doing story telling. Students came up with more ideas to do next year, they are at the bottom of the student survey sheets. Students came up with 11 new stories for next year. All students improved talking from the first time in a circle. One student had a hard time doing the story telling out of 23 students.

Checking: The data gathered through the study showed students fear of talking went down. This took on a community building affect pulling all students together. The class teacher said

the students were working better together. Both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal students need to feel a positive atmosphere in the class to have the confidence and self-esteem to talk openly in the class. All students need to feel a positive community to learn. Public speaking is something all students can benefit from. When any student's emotional walls are up it makes learning harder to do. When you cannot be yourself your energy goes into protecting yourself which leaves less energy to do school work and less energy for making new friends. Creating more space helps lower emotional walls to connect to other students and to take in the things students are trying to learn at school.

Reflections - We have learned that Aboriginal culture can be very powerful tool to use for any grade. Students learn by seeing the time it takes to make a cultural bent wood box stage over the whole year. I worked with the community to donate the materials needed to make the stage. It takes approximately 20 hours to paint Aboriginal art around the stage and 14 hours to make the Bent Wood Box Stage. I don't tell students they matter, I show them by the effort I put out for the students and all the planning to make this come together. The students that are the artists and builders helped me over the year to make this Bent Wood Box Stage. I had about eight students over the year help me make the cultural stage. Elders have always told me all knowledge is outside of your comfort-zone and you have to move out of your comfort-zone to learn. We all learn at different speeds and the traditional Talking circle is respectful of this. Students loved to learn about each other in games. Students were very proud of their work making all the masks and telling the stories to the class. Local First Nations people use the Bent Wood Box for coming of age ceremonies, when young people turn 12 or 13 years old they stand on the Bent Wood box in the ceremony. After the ceremony students are seen as youth in training at becoming young adults. Students asked if I was going to have a Drama group use the stage in the library. Two students went to classes and asked who would like a Drama class at school. Before I knew it the two students had 14 students that wanted to come to an Aboriginal Drama group. We came up with the name **Raven Theater** and will have it on Thursdays at lunch starting in September for 45 minutes. Our school leader liked the idea to start out next year with an Aboriginal Drama group at lunch. This will become my next inquiry. Inquiry helped me to see what can be by helping students find their voice and go where students are interested.