



2015-2016 AESN Case Study

School: Coal Tye Elementary

District: #68 Nanaimo Ladysmith

Inquiry Team Members: Tony Elliott, Derek DeGear,
Doug English, Leila Lattimer

Contact: Tony Elliott

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. Helping students understand Aboriginal Worldview creating self-esteem, public speaking, communication, critical and creative thinking.

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

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

Hunch: In every class survey I have done, the fear of talking 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 difficult.

New professional learning: The evidence is in the positive behaviors between all students. The level of engagement of all students went up. The students that could not talk at all could talk in the class after all of 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 about how Aboriginals showed support when the speaker was talking, 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 with all students having open hands facing the student talking.

Taking action: At the end, after all the games and talking circles, I wrote down the students' feedback about doing story telling. All students did better talking from the first time in a circle.

All students told their stories very well. I was so proud how well this class did through the whole process this year. This was the best respectful class to work with. Every game and every teaching the students did very well. Games that grade 12 students found hard, this class did without slowing down or fear doing it.

Checking: The data gathered through the study showed students fear of talking went down. The teacher said the class worked better together. This took on a community building affect pulling all students more together. 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 new friends. Creating more space lowering emotional walls to connect to other students and take in the things students are trying to learn at school. I have worked with men with trauma and addiction for 14 years, two times a week. To help men counter the negative effects of loss of self is to find your voice. When we build students up to be strong students with emotional intelligence and a strong emotional connection to themselves it helps close the door on the negative long term effects of trauma. When students are more connected to each other it lowers bad behavior in the class. When students are in survival mode they miss out on a lot of learning and creating close friends. You do not have to go into trauma to heal trauma. By creating a safe respectful place for students to learn and play games you are helping students overcome the negative effects of unmet needs that were traumatizing for students. The number of students struggling with trauma is higher than we think.

Reflections: We have learned that Aboriginal culture can be a very powerful tool to use for any grade. Students learn by seeing the time it takes to make this cultural bent wood box stage over the whole year. I have worked with the community to donate the materials needed to make the stage; it takes about 20 hours to paint Aboriginal art around the stage and 10 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 help me over the year to make this Bent Wood Box Stage. Over the year there were eight students who helped 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 learning 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 16 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. **Raven Theater:** I thought let's do the same thing at Coal Tyee as we are planning to do at Cilaire Elementary – start an Aboriginal Drama group. We will meet on Wednesdays at lunch starting in September for 45 minutes. I would like to have a female staff work with me because this brings balance to the Drama group. 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 done by helping students find their voice and go where students are interested. This year prepared the way for more culture to be in the school using the cultural Bent Wood Box stage. Creating a cultural space for students has been a great experience seeing the pride in the students that helped with it. Using the cultural stage for 40 grade 7 students on June 27 2016 was one of the high points for students and parents.