



2015-2016 AESN Case Study

School: Cultural Journeys

District: #48 Sea to Sky

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Your focus for this year: How can we encourage connectedness and sense of place/belonging by promoting learning of self, family, community and land?

Scanning: Since Cultural Journeys is a program of choice, our students came from all different schools, with a variety of experiences and backgrounds.

Focus: In September, we noticed that our students didn't feel a sense of connection to the people or the place of their learning. We wanted to create attachments, build a sense of connection and belonging and encourage understanding of self, family and community. Creating a safe place for our learners where they all felt cared about and loved was a top priority. We had an opportunity and an imperative to utilize the flexibility and resources we had been given to try to increase the sense of community, emotional learning and pride/self confidence in our children. We wanted to help build a love of learning through engagement, passion and experiential learning.

Hunch: As a new school, we were a blank slate. We were immersed in the world of start-up and were trying to find our identity, our values and best practices. However, the traditional classroom wasn't working for our learners so we knew we had to be different and put our students needs at the forefront. Utilizing First Nations perspectives, a model of attachment development and the many benefits of nature/place-based learning, we knew we had a winning formula. It took all year to figure out how to make these work together, but we can proudly say we have found our identity and know whom we are!

New professional learning: We explored place-based learning, experiential learning, trial and error, circle process, soft-start, community building, self-regulation strategies and developing self-awareness. The resources that were most helpful were collaboration with colleagues to mull over what worked and what didn't. This took in place in after school conversations and staff meetings.

Taking action:

- Soft Start
- Circle Process/Check-Ins
- Medicine Wheel – rediscovery of self, family, community, land.
- Field Studies – Outdoor classroom
- Masks – that show ourselves within the medicine wheel
- Plant Walks – exploring traditional plants and animals
- Language – exploring the natural world through the Squamish Language
- Friendship Project – making connections/friendships across the community

- Canoeing/Group games – teaching teamwork
- Potlatch – generosity, teamwork, responsibility, respect, individual gifts, protocols, Community and family.

Checking: Wow! Looking back at September, our school is a different place. We still have a long way to go but slowly the transformation is happening. We have a strong sense of community and family, the students are demonstrating what they learned about respect for others and place, and students are connected to loving adults and to each other. They are learning to have pride in their heritage and are starting to understand the history and resilience of their people. Through understanding themselves, their emotions and their families they are able to make better choices that reflect who they are/they want to be. Their confidence is strengthening and they are starting to embrace their culture and who they are. Our non-Aboriginal learners are starting to embrace connections with First Nations culture and connect it to what they know about their land and community.

Reflections/Advice: We learned that this process takes time, patience, and practice and is messy! We had to teach our students to stop associating outside with just playing, and teach them how to learn outside. We learned that academics have to come after self-regulation, connection and safety. It's alright to take as long as it takes to get there, it is all part of the process. The circle has been pivotal in providing a safe place to share feelings and thoughts and to celebrate successes.

Next year we want to continue this journey. We also want to have a blessing ceremony to promote more connection to place and provide a positive energy in our school. We want to start the year by sharing cultures/lineages and celebrating who we are! This will help to deepen connections.