



2015-2016 AESN Case Study

School: Dewdney Elementary School

District: #75 Mission

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Our focus for this year: Our focus was to build connectedness and relationship through engagement with the land, nature, and the outdoors.
Our First People's Principle of Learning: Learning recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge.

Scanning: Our Aboriginal liaison interviewed students individually using our Student Connectivity Survey. All students felt connected to at least two adults in the building. One of the areas that fairly consistently showed up was that the students only "sometimes" learned about Aboriginal peoples of Canada.

We noticed that many students were not engaged in reciprocal class discussions around Aboriginal perspectives. We also noticed they had difficulty setting goals and distinguishing between task and learning. This led us to believe that we needed to work together to engage students in deeper understanding of Aboriginal knowledge that is woven throughout the curriculum.

We focused on the role of indigenous knowledge and connectedness through our outdoor and project based learning.

Focus: We participated in a school scan survey that was created by our Aboriginal department. The areas we identified as being "unsure" were "Does every student have genuine opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of and respect for Indigenous ways of knowing?" In one class of 20 primary students, it appeared only one student really understood and was quick to answer questions around connections with the land: knowledge, understanding and relationship. We realized that we could be more focused and intentional to increase the learning opportunities around the indigenous relationship with nature.

Hunch: As a school we tended to compartmentalize our knowledge and understanding of First Peoples around special events and activities. Our staff is not knowledgeable about the relationship with the land and First Peoples' culture and traditions. Therefore, it was more difficult to interweave knowledge day to day. We wanted to move away from one way of learning – pen and paper and explore other avenues of learning that could connect all people and we felt that learning in an outdoor setting would help us with our connectedness.

New professional learning: We have just created a new outdoor Naturescape, garden boxes and classroom learning area known as the DEN on our school property. All teachers are engaged in implementing outdoor learning in their everyday teaching. We recognized that we had an opportunity to develop curriculum, deepen cultural understanding and explore learning in a natural setting. Our professional learning explored traditional stories including the Three Sisters Story, Hatzic Rock, Inuit understanding and the history of Inuksuit. We also learned about the Dewdney slough, traditional fishing methods and use of natural plants and animals in

their tools and the relationship of the Stolo people to this salmon tributary. We learned about animals and their meanings through spirit stones, post painting and a Métis canoe. *“Students and teachers will develop place-based knowledge about the area in which they live, learning about and building on Aboriginal knowledge and other traditional knowledge of the area.”*

Taking action: ✓ Permanent artwork: Painting a Metis canoe and garden posts and fastening them permanently to our outdoor learning area is a constant source of pride and questions. Each day the students enter the building, or learn in the DEN they will see their artwork and remember and discuss the meaning behind it.

✓ Gardening: Creating a three sisters garden was a meaningful hands-on experience that brought the story to life every day. It taught the lesson of working together in community to support each other. The students loved tending and caring for their Aboriginal story garden.

✓ Outdoor learning: Students walked to the slough to see and experience first-hand how our First Peoples fished the waters and used plants and animals for their tools in catching salmon. Students understood the importance of salmon as a way of life and history. They raised salmon and released them and visited the local hatchery to deepen their understanding. They also read stories of Inuksuit outside as they sat on the rock swale and then created their own Inuksuk and placed it in their special spot outside. They were so calm when they were settled in their place and had the opportunity to reflect and share. The spirit stones led the children to reflect on themselves and their strengths. It taught them to be proud of their gifts. We noticed other painted stones in our DEN from students who wanted to use the rocks to communicate. Many students kept their stones on their desk. We took students on forest field trips providing them the opportunity to explore, notice and wonder. The conversations were rich with both traditional teachings (what their grandpa did) and environmental stewardship and care.

Checking: We noticed that students were very engaged in the hands-on outdoor learning. Students would talk about their families, their Aboriginal relatives in a seamless conversation. Many students wanted to learn how to make traditional nets. We also noticed that allowing time and space for reflection and understanding was very important. We would like to build on this concept of allowing time for reflection and expression. We loved the knowledge and understanding we gained from the three sisters’ garden – the class was so enthusiastic about it. Engaging the students in learning in a natural setting increased their level of engagement and participation. It also spurred them on to think of other ways to explore Aboriginal knowledge and to dig deeper. They also developed classroom community and a shared positive experience. They are so proud of their artwork.

Reflections/Advice: We learned how important time and space is to learning. We sometimes in such a rush to “get through the curriculum”, that we miss time to enjoy, engage, think, reflect and share. This is an area we are all going to work on as we think this deepens the students’ understanding and transformation. We found it difficult to find elders or indigenous teachers who could talk about traditional connections to the land. We still feel this is an area that we would like to learn more about as a staff and help integrate it into our everyday teaching. We are still hoping to find people who can help adults and children learn about the uses of indigenous plants. We feel we can improve on working and reflecting as a team rather than within our own classrooms. We also learned that using an outdoor setting with authentic tools allows other styles of learning to emerge and gives opportunity for rich discussion, questioning and demonstration of knowledge. Being able to touch fishing tools, raise and release salmon, explore a traditional outdoor forest, create a garden to reflect traditional understandings are catalysts to natural curiosity in children.