



2015-2016 AESN Case Study

School: Earl Marriott Secondary

District: #36 Surrey

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Your focus for this year: Our school focus was to create a *Gathering Place* within the Earl Marriott Secondary Library, create a genuine artifact (Salish Weave Project), and have team members attend professional development seminars to better their understanding, while also improving communication with other schools involved in similar activities – the improvement of learning and sharing opportunities amongst Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in a school setting

Scanning: Working with our team members including our Aboriginal support worker(s), we discussed what current students were feeling and examined some options of what we wanted to create to better suit our learning community.

In talking with students and listening to their learning desires, we tried to see which one of the (nine) *First Peoples Principles of Learning* was being mentioned most commonly. Gathering and recording responses revealed that students most commonly talked of how it would be beneficial to have a specific place to explore one's identity, as well as the important role of indigenous knowledge in their learning, while at the same time being able to always have a sense of place within their school that they could form a continuous bond with.

In general, students frequently mentioned our schools overcrowding, and described what they felt as being 'anonymous' and having no meaningful place to meet before and after school, as well as during their lunch break. In an attempt to remedy such a common problem, our team embarked on creatively designing a place that could be described as a 'Gathering Place', in which students, staff, and members of the community could meet and discuss.

Focus: I have been a librarian for a relatively short time, and am always looking for ways to support more learners at our school. Since our library does have some free space, we thought of creating a communal area for students to meet, share, and follow their curiosities. Again, our school is overcrowded, so quiet, focused space is difficult to find. We were therefore hoping to offer our learners and community members a unique spot to engage in communicating, discovering, and overall taking comfort in visiting a special 'Gathering Place' within their busy school & community.

Hunch: As mentioned previously, Earl Marriott is quite crowded, though we do have a great staff and student population who do their best in light of an overcrowded population. As a remedy for overcrowding, our school has two unique schedules which correspond to grade 8/9's on an early schedule, and grade 10/11/12's on a later schedule. Again, this schedule does work, and does allow all students to have full timetables, but it also alienates some students and teachers alike.

It is this current scenario of overcrowding where our teams 'hunches' began to manifest. We feel that some students are feeling disconnected and commonly share that anonymous feeling, and we felt that a central, consistent location for some students to gather and share would be an ideal solution to balance the somewhat lonely feelings that some students have towards their own learning environment.

New professional learning: I attended the May 13-15 Networks of Inquiry & Innovation (NOII) Symposium as a way to experience what other schools across BC and the Yukon were doing to offer their students assistance and support during times of Aboriginal transitions. I gathered further ideas, besides what we planned on doing at EMS for the remainder of this school year, and brought these ideas home to my colleagues to discuss and potentially pursue in years to come at Earl Marriott with regards to improving support for Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal students.

Taking action: We invited two weavers to discuss a weaving project that we desired to create for our school. After a quick consultation during the last week of April, they gladly agreed to create patterns, and eventually visited to construct a Salish Weaving Project to hang in our school to cherish for years to come. We used half of the grant money (\$250) to purchase the coloured wool required to construct the blanket. They made great strides in beginning the weaving process and planned to finish the blanket near the end of May 2016.



Instead of listing strategies, I think it suits our group more accurately to list common outlooks, attributes, and mindsets. Our group has been quite patient in waiting for actual physical changes to occur within our space. Alternatively, we have been well versed and discussed in what we eventually foresee taking shape within our Library. In addition, our group has been creative in the spaces we imagined that would serve to assist students in finding a 'home' within the school. Additional funding for such projects is always scarce in supply, and it is up to the members of your group to find the best way to raise educational awareness for your ventures so that others groups and departments can hopefully assist your group with reaching shared goals.

Checking: From our original focus, we are in the process of designing and implementing a Gathering Place, and completing and displaying our Salish Weave Project. We all believe that such a gathering place will pique the interest and curiosity of our student population and from that sort of 'hook', we plan to demonstrate to students that this is a consistent space, unobstructed by the business of the school, but at the same time embracing and harnessing that positive energy that our school population currently possesses.

Stemming from the current trends in education, we believe our changes do not need to encompass all that is Aboriginal for students to benefit. We do believe however that if students are exposed to an increasing amount of new cultural experiences, that they will then travel in an educational direction that is most meaningful to them. We hope that our students' new journeys will have spawned from the differences our group is striving to bring to life within the Library. To use an alternate wording than *richer*, we have experienced more personally

meaningful responses from students as we constructed our Gathering Place and decorated this space with culturally significant resources.

Reflections/Advice: From our inquiry, we learned that all of our goals within this project cannot entirely be completed in one school year. Learning that this transition into increased sharing and learning amongst the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal school community is more about a process over many years, and not just an occurrence over a 10-month school year. Further, to borrow a phrase from the First Peoples Principles of Learning, this process “...involves patience and time.”

As for advice to other schools with similar interests to ours, we would suggest that they plan early enough in the beginning of a school year to ensure that their ideas have enough time to transition into actions. As well, be sure to have adequate funding and resources in place ahead of time in order to acquire any furniture or technology needed to support your ideas. For example, our team is still searching for a circular coffee table, constructed of wood that would possibly work for our space. If we had taken some time earlier in the planning phase to find such a furniture item, we may have been able to obtain it earlier.