



## 2015-2016 AESN Case Study

**School:** Ebus Academy

**District:** #91 Nechako Lakes

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**Our Focus for this year:** How will a continued and deepened focus on providing cultural opportunities and using culturally relevant material for Aboriginal learners as well as Non-Aboriginal learners in our online school (EBUS Academy) improve their participation rates and connectedness to their learning/school?

**Scanning:** Ebus learners are spread all over the province, from remote locations to urban centres. It is difficult to develop relationships with the sheer numbers of learners at such distances. Learners rarely reach out to the school, except to submit work for report cards or to get assignments from the online class sites. We saw improvements in Aboriginal student connectedness to EBUS Academy and engagement with their learning as observed by their attendance at cultural learning events last year. But we wanted to see even greater involvement. When we call Aboriginal families to engage in conversation about their learning or invite them to an event, we are met with surprise and wonder. Last year, not as many learners and families attended the cultural events as we had hoped.

The OECD principles that are most evident in our work this year are those about building horizontal connections, learners at the centre and the social nature of learning. Many of the First Nations Principles of Learning guided us through every action and are woven into our reflections below.

**Focus:** We wanted to build a better relationship with our learners to make sure they are learning about the history of their area and all of BC in terms of Aboriginal cultural awareness. We want students to learn about this because our Canadian history happened the way it did, and knowing about it will support healing. We want them to know why there is poverty and scarred people. Knowing about our history will help create better relationships at a community level and a societal level and create better futures for all of us. EBUS Academy Aboriginal learners deserve to be learning about this too.

My own Father, later in life showed me his knees. He had scars from his days at Indian Residential School from kneeling on vents as a punishment. He never shared his experiences when I was younger because it was too painful. He was also fluent in Carrier Language and spoke it openly in his home with my grandmother, but they never taught me to speak it. To this day, community members still hold judgmental views (refer to "Indian corner at the local 7-11) and we need to change that to improve relationships between and amongst all of us.

Aboriginal Education not only needs to be taught to our students, but our teachers as well. With 40% of our district student population being of Aboriginal descent, we have a vested interest in the local culture. Having worked at two different schools and with many staff, I have not had any resistance to the programs or opportunities presented to staffs. We work

together, staff and local First Nations members, to ensure that we give students a unique learning experience about local traditions. In light of the new curriculum, it is important that we give teachers an opportunity to access First Nations content for the courses they teach.

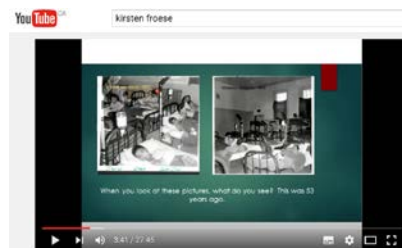
**Hunch:** At EBUS, in the past, Aboriginal Education was not part of the services they offered, yet they claimed students with Aboriginal Ancestry in their enrolment count. The school leaders took care of checking in with Aboriginal families but it was focused on whether they spent their money (each family gets some targeted dollars to spend on academic support or cultural learning). There were no services offered, no cultural education provided.

**New professional learning:** We attended the Inspire Conference in Calgary and the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) conference in Calgary with the intention of taking advantage of networking opportunities and finding new resources. We gained ideas from other participants on our district team and from other districts and territories. The workshops and professional conversations helped us design our next steps. We have also created a network within the district where we share our learning.

**Taking action:** Integrating Aboriginal Culture with curriculum (Science, Socials Studies, Language Arts) through experiential opportunities.

We learned from last year's lessons...location is key. We had to learn where large numbers of our learners lived (got a map out) and chose areas with high Aboriginal numbers in a region.

- Mapes Elementary and EBUS Academy Students netting salmon at the Nadleh River
  - Learning about the salmon lifecycle and preparing the fish for smoking (resource: Dipnetting with Dad)
- Distributed Strong Readers to 90 Ebus primary students
- Learning workshop with Marion Hunt-Doig (friendship scarves)
- Stoney Creek Woman Online Novel Study was open to First Nations 12 and Grade 8 English students. Special guest speakers were highlighted in v-class sessions (Mary John Sr.'s son Ernie shared his stories about poverty and the difficult life they had, a granddaughter spoke about traditional medicines)
- Mini-drum and Hoop Dance Workshop in Chilliwack
- Visit to Ksan Historical Village (field study)
- Ness Lake camp out included the Drum Stock Game, Dreamcatcher designing, Painting with Aboriginal techniques with Shirley Babcock
- Uploaded videos of traditional practices from Nakazdli First Nations Heritage Days (available online at <https://www.youtube.com/user/kfroese2> ).



**Checking:** Significantly Increased numbers in our activities:

- Grade 5/6 class and three EBUS students from Prince George -Netting and smoking fish
- 15 students and their parents -Marion Hunt Doig's Scarf workshop
- 13 students -Stoney Creek Woman novel study
- 20 students and 22 parents -Drum and Hoop Dance Workshop

- Ness Lake -33 students

Interviewed participants asking them about what they learned.

Students learned through hands on activities, how to catch fish in nets, fillet them in the traditional ways, smoke them and they could speak about them with very descriptive and specific terminology.

The stories the guest speakers told during the Stoney Creek Woman learning were amazing. Mary John's son came in to tell stories. It brought the novel alive because we used primary sources to augment the story. You can read about poverty in the book but when you hear the story of taking the train to Kamloops.

Through all of these activities students remembered the information at a deep, heart level, rather than at a surface head level.

### **Reflections/Advice:**

*Learners at the Centre (literally and figuratively)*

This online Aboriginal Education role is a brand new for me, and am learning that it is important to get out to the learners. We attempted last year and had some success but we didn't really analyze the accessibility of the locations where we offered our cultural events. Location is key and getting out to the learners is a new idea for this online role.

*Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.*

*Learning is imbedded in memory, history and story.*

We have also learned that our success is more than just offering opportunities to learn from good resources. Our students learn more deeply (heart and mind) when we invite real live people who have lived through this history to tell their stories and experiences. This is some of the most powerful learning that can take place. The people's voices enriched the learning and the students went way beyond what simply reading a book can provide. It personalized the learning and touch the hearts of everyone involved.

### **Next Steps:**

It seems there is an appetite for greater connectedness and for hands on real life experiences in many different places (Learning is experiential and relational).

- Four other District #91 schools have booked the mobile smokehouse for next year and will share their learning.
- Mapes Elementary has requested that the Aboriginal Education Worker get involved in more teaching and learning and in more depth with their students and adults and Ebus learners will again be invited to participate alongside.
- With the implementation of the new curriculum that has Aboriginal learning embedded in every aspect, we are putting together a library of resources for Ebus teachers to use and we are providing inservice and introductions to the resources in the fall.
- Another Ebus teacher is ready to join the inquiry work through her courses on Fine Arts and Home Economics.