



## 2015-2016 AESN Case Study

**School:** Garibaldi Highlands Elementary

**District:** #48 Sea to Sky

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**Our focus for this year:** Our focus was Reconciliation - Through the lens of reconciliation and honouring First Nations tradition of circle, how will a focus on kindness/ empathy impact my learning environment?

**Scanning:** When scanning K/1 students at GHE, we noticed that there is some room for growth in the area of respect for others. We would like students to develop more empathy. Some behaviors that need to be addressed: Using hurtful words like "I don't like you"; physically pushing others out of the way; disrespecting nature.

When observing my 4/5 students, we have noticed that there is some room for growth in the area of respect, kindness and empathy for others. We would like students to develop more empathy and respect for one another. Some behaviors that need to be addressed are: calling out when others are talking, interrupting others when they are working, bothering others when they are working, physically pushing others out of the way. I have chosen respect, kindness and empathy for others as my focus because of the behaviours I have observed. We still see students thinking mainly about themselves. At this age, they should be more aware of their actions, how their actions affect others and how others feel, so I believe that their self-centeredness is not developmentally appropriate. However, they should be given the instruction and tools to become more aware of other's feelings and treat others more kindly. It appears as though some students are unaware of how others feel. They may need more exposure to the experiences of others and to be encouraged to really think about how others feel. We expect to learn about using circle as a way to develop empathy and respect for others. We plan to set up experiences for children that require them to put themselves in another's shoes. Through circle, we plan to explore the elements of speaking from the heart and listening. Through circle we hope those students who are not yet showing respect, kindness and empathy will learn to be more respectful, kind and empathetic.

**Focus:** I chose respect for others as my focus because of the unkind words and behaviors I observed. I saw students thinking mainly about themselves. While I believed that self-centeredness is developmentally appropriate, I believed they should be given the instruction and tools to become more aware of other's feelings and treat others more kindly.

**Hunch:** It appeared as though students were unaware of how others feel. They may have needed more exposure to the experiences of others and encouraged to really think about how others feel. We wondered if doing so many individual activities led to this self-centeredness. Maybe more group activities would help.

**New professional learning:** We learned about the talking circle as a traditional way to solve problems by First Nations people. We learned how talking circles work, types of talking circles, and guidelines for conducting a circle.

The most helpful resources were the District Principal of Aboriginal Education, our First Nations Culture Teacher, and our colleagues at school. We also learned from articles such as *Talking Circle: Creating Community in our Elementary Classrooms*, *Who Cares? How Teachers Can Scaffold Children's Ability to Care: A Case for Picture Books*, and *Honouring Our Stories: Aboriginal Primary Students Sense of Belonging in Public School Classrooms*.

The designs used to support the learning of our colleagues were group meetings, student surveys, journaling, and focus groups.

**Taking action:**

- Surveyed students about Community Circle using a smiley face questionnaire.
- used the social responsibility scoring guide for students to self-assess where they were at.
- conducted talking circles in the classroom to discuss current issues, built trust among students, and/or discussed responses to stories.
- Sample topics: what makes me happy, sad, angry, or excited; my favourite activities and why they are favourites; why my friend is special; why my family is important to me; what this story reminds me of; who this character reminds me of; which other book this one reminds me of and why.
- used the circle for conflict resolution.
- conducted a focus group to find out what students were thinking about using circle.
- introduced students to the concept that they can call a circle when they feel that a student's behaviour needs to be addressed.
- used the drum to call a circle.
- made notes of our observations on how students interacted in the circle and if their behaviours changed in the circle.
- made notes of our observations on how students interacted with each other in the classroom and if their behaviours changed in the classroom.
- tried to teach them about how we are all responsible for each other's hearts (well-being) not just the teacher by exposing my vulnerability to them.
- had students lead the circle.
- had students give compliments about how peers behaved during circle.
- Learning from an Aboriginal consultant - used the circle to try to build resilience.

**Checking:** I have learned that the students in my class are more respectful and empathetic, but generally more so in a circle than in the usual class environment.

**Baseline and change evidence**

- Student surveys
- Student reflections
- Social Responsibility Scoring Guide
- Teacher journaling

**Reflections/Advice:**

- We learned that circles are more powerful than we realized particularly if protocol is followed. Using protocol for conflict resolution circle has been especially important. We

have learned that our students are gaining a better understanding of being respectful, kind and empathetic to one another through circle.

- We learned about honouring First Nations people. We are learning about cultural protocol and guidelines for circle and this is making us feel more comfortable with the process.
- We learned about resilience. The need to build a student's resilience so that they can learn, build on and bounce back from the stumbling blocks in their way. We are learning about the need to honour students in a variety of ways and about the four blankets of resilience – self, family, community and culture.
- Since I have learned through this inquiry that the students in my class are more respectful and empathetic more so in a circle, I wonder how I can get this to transfer to everyday settings.