



2015-2016 AESN Case Study

Schools: Garibaldi Highlands Elementary and Cultural Journeys
District: #48 Sea to Sky

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Our focus for this year: We will focus on connecting children within the Squamish community and building friendship amongst students within our two schools.

Big idea

- Strong communities are the result of being connected to each other and working together toward common goals
- Learning about indigenous peoples nurtures multicultural awareness and respect for diversity

Essential Questions

- Will children from two diverse school communities be able to develop friendships and create bonds that will connect them as members of their larger community?
- Will learning about identity help children to connect with each other as individuals?
- Will learning about the culture of Coast Salish people, encourage discovery of identity for Aboriginal students and increase understanding for non-aboriginal students?

Scanning: At Garibaldi Highlands Elementary, while reading a children's classic story we noticed that students didn't recognize inappropriate terminology (e.g., using old terminology for First Nations people). When one child pointed it out, we stopped and had a discussion about how our collective thinking has changed over the past 100 years, and what used to be acceptable isn't any longer.

Cultural Journeys is a new program of choice (public school) with a First Nations and Place-based Outdoor education focus. Students at this school are immersed in Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Culture, language classes and learning about the natural world through Indigenous ways of knowing. At Cultural Journeys students have been learning more about residential schools and are beginning to understand the impact the schools have had on Aboriginal people in Canada.

When thinking about the OECD principles of learning (e.g. recognizing individual differences), we noticed great diversity within the two schools and wondered about the potential learning that could emerge if students were able to gather together and participate in a variety of projects centered around building identity and community. Our two schools have students from very different socio-economic backgrounds yet we all live within Squamish. When speaking with students, we noticed that there is a need for greater awareness and appreciation for other cultures.

Focus: We (the teachers) began discussing how to bridge the gap so that when these students end up all together in our single middle school they will understand the diversity within our community and not only accept each other for their differences (cultural or personality), but also remain connected as friends.

Together as teachers we gathered evidence from scanning and developed our focus, along with several project ideas. Through this inquiry we hoped that children would develop critical thinking skills, understand that they have a voice, and realize that people will listen to their feelings and ideas.

Hunch: The children in Squamish usually socialize within their local area even on community sports teams. We believe that there is a need to build relationships amongst students within the different areas in order to promote a deeper understanding and awareness of the diverse cultures that make up Squamish.

New professional learning: We framed our inquiry with projects embedded throughout. We explored project based learning, read about it, and learned a lot through practice with our classes.

We used the First Peoples Principles of learning to guide our projects and planning.

We explored resources to learn more about building character traits and self-discovery. As students asked the question “Who am I?” we hoped to also develop their understanding of how our identity is constantly changing and growing throughout our lives. We asked ourselves the question, “How can we help students to have a growth mindset?”

Elders and First Nations Culture teachers were invited to co-plan and co-teach throughout the inquiry. We wanted to learn as much as we could about how to incorporate Indigenous ways of Knowing and learning into our everyday learning experiences. It was our intention to learn about how to help students take ownership over being part of the truth and reconciliation process.

As teachers, we explored our own identity and mindset so we could better understand how to help students learn more about themselves.

Taking action: We had nine visits in total and took turns hosting each other. Every visit started with a circle where one student would acknowledge the territory and welcome everyone. We then moved to a mingle activity in partners or as a group with the goal of having children learn more about each other and make personal connections. They talked about things they had in common, interests, and practiced making new friends. After recess and snack we worked on a project until lunch. The first few visits we noticed a need to give more time for students to interact so we adapted and gave more time for play and exploration.

We did a self-discovery project where students painted a self-portrait on one tile, and a Coast Salish animal on another tile. The animal they chose (raven, bear, eagle, wolf, salmon) best represented who they are. Two Skwxwú7mesh Coast Salish artists taught students how to draw the animals before they painted them onto the tiles. We read First Nations stories and talked about the different characteristics and traits of the animals. In circle we used animal puppets to reflect on our learning and set personal goals (e.g. “I want to be like the raven by...” or “I was

like the eagle when I...”). After the tiles were complete, we put them into two separate collages, one for each school.

Cultural Journeys students have experienced and hosted a traditional Potlatch ceremony. Together with GHE we decided to host a Spring Potlatch with a focus on celebrating our friendship and strengthened community. We were advised by our language and culture teacher about Potlatch protocol because we wanted to give our students an authentic experience. Students and staff worked together to prepare gifts for all of our 120 guests. Cultural Journeys harvested cedar, devil’s club (to make beads), frog’s leaf, comfrey, and willow (to make salve), and salmon berries, lemongrass, minor’s lettuce (for food). The two schools got together for a full day of gift making: driftwood art, Coast Salish bookmarks, weaving, cedar jewelry and key chains, and painted rocks. Students also took on roles and responsibilities during the Potlatch such as: door-person, calling witnesses, thanking witnesses, handing out gifts, preparing food, serving food and speaking. A grade six Skwxwú7mesh student from Cultural Journeys was one of the main speakers and showed great leadership and pride in his culture. We had a group of staff, students and Skwxwú7mesh community members lead in singing and dancing. Parents and community members from both schools contributed food. The Potlatch was a huge success and we still hear positive comments from the community about how meaningful it was.

Checking: We feel that we made a difference by bringing the two school communities together. Children made friendships with students who they otherwise might have not known. They learned more about First Nations culture and ways of knowing, being and doing. Both communities gained new perspectives and respect for cultures different from their own. Students from Garibaldi Highlands deepened their understanding of First Nations culture and developed empathy for residential school survivors and the removal of the Potlatch.

Over the year we saw friendships develop. Students commented on how at first they didn’t feel like they had much in common. During the partner and group games they discovered commonalities amongst themselves. This made it easier for them to get to know and understand each other.

Reflections/Advice: We believe that our inquiry was effective because the big ideas and focus of the “Friendship Project” were enmeshed in the learning within each of our classrooms. It was something that all our teachers thought of in our daily planning, always thinking ahead to our next step. We reflected on where the kids were at and supported them in the classroom to help prepare them for our learning within the context of the full group.

We realized again that meaningful change takes time, to have patience and let the learning happen naturally instead of expecting results right away.

It is not just within a school that we need to move from isolation to collaboration, it’s also across schools within a district. The teachers were inspired by each other and by visiting the schools.

We hope to continue bringing the two schools together in the future!