



2015-2016 AESN Case Study

School: Howard DeBeck Elementary

District: #38 Richmond

Inquiry Team Members:

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Area of Focus: Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement

Our focus for this year: Playful storytelling, weaving in First Peoples Principles of Learning, collaboration between Kindergarten Teacher and Teacher Librarian, using authentic resources.

Scanning: In working with Kindergarten children, we have found that they are eager to share personal experiences, beginning to become aware of similarities and differences amongst themselves, and “making connections” to books, comments and stories of peers. We are focusing on oral storytelling during our Library collaboration time and meeting weekly for teacher reflection and planning, realizing that this is an important part of the teaching/learning process. We are noticing that children are learning self-regulation through opportunities to use materials for storytelling and we are curious to explore this further.

Focus: We are working collaboratively this year and our inquiry focus is: “How can a Teacher and a Teacher Librarian collaborate using playful inquiry and playful storytelling, using the Library Learning Commons, weaving in the First Peoples Principles of Learning?”. Using a variety of materials, the talking circle and the First Peoples Principles of Learning how can children’s stories go into more depth, with a focus on personal experiences and meaning?

Hunch: The First Peoples Principles of Learning are becoming an increasingly important part of our new curriculum and we are wanting to weave this into many parts of our day, at the school level. Using playful storytelling and inquiry is a student centered approach which offers meaningful and valid experiences through play for the young children.

For both teachers, being non-Indigenous, we were very concerned about being respectful of this way of learning. We wanted to have practice in incorporating the First Peoples Principles of Learning on a regular basis and weren’t sure how this would become natural in our day to day teaching. We wondered if using the talking circle consistently would have an effect on the classroom community. We wondered if we would be able to not feel so rushed in our daily activities, by allowing time for talking.

New Professional Learning: The teachers are involved in a district group focused on Playful storytelling through the First People Principles of Learning. During this time, we are able to observe other teachers currently using some of these storytelling techniques and materials as well as having our Early Learning Teacher Consultant as a Mentor. We will participate in meetings with teachers across the district over the course of the year and would like to share ideas with our own staff. We attended a Professional Development Day at Musqueam in the 2014/15 School year and would like to use some of the knowledge gained during this experience.

Taking action: Over the course of the school year the Kindergarten Teacher and Teacher-Librarian collaborated once a week for a double “block” of time in addition to weekly meetings to reflect and plan. In order to integrate the First Peoples Principles of Learning we established the talking circle and used it extensively. We would gather the children in a circle upon arrival to our library collaboration time and would debrief at our closing circle before leaving the library. We noticed that this process gave the children a voice, and they developed patience while listening to each other. The talking circle enabled “the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors” (First Peoples Principles of Learning, First Nations Education Steering Committee, FNEESC). During our collaboration we engaged in reading Indigenous stories and playful storytelling, using local and FNEESC recommended books and resources. To involve “generational roles and responsibilities” (First Peoples Principles of Learning, FNEESC) we carefully chose books that reflected this and drew the children’s attention to these roles.

This relates to the principle that: “Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational.” (First Peoples Principles of Learning, FNEESC). The students and teachers participated in a wet-felting project which related to the idea of a “sense of place and connectedness”. The central idea was to connect the children with where they live through the wet-felting. They drew and painted pictures about where they live, focused on the colours in their environment and natural elements around them. They placed their wool to represent Richmond, The Fraser River, and Vancouver. We are currently working on decorating cedar planks, infused with the children’s sense of place, using paint, fineliners, colours and textures.



In addition, after reading *Sweetest Kulu*, the children learned about the significance of non-material gifts that the animals could bring baby Kulu, often relating their ideas to themselves.

The children answered: What would the animals bring baby Kulu?

- Dragonfly brought power.
- Sea otter brought swimming and not being afraid in water.
- Wolf brought warmth.
- Bear brought protection.

- Raccoon brought love.
- Eagle brought strength.
- Beaver brought hugs.

Our use of media, story mats and kinesthetic activities links to the idea that: “Learning recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge” (First Peoples Principles of Learning, FNEESC).

The children had opportunities to explore “Learning requires exploration of one’s identity.” (First Peoples Principles of Learning, FNEESC) through the stories, “Sharing our World” and “Sometimes I Feel Like a Fox”. The children explored their identities through making family poles and masks that showed their connection to animals.

“The bear is protecting and the hummingbird sings.” (Kindergarten student)

The children expressed their connections to animals in our sharing circle:

- sometimes I feel like a beaver because I go to Scouts (like beavers).
- sometimes I feel like a panda because I’m cute.
- cat...they eat mouse and scratch.
- bearded dragon...they are cute and loved.
- baby duck...they are cute.
- pig...they’re funny.
- monkey (tamarin)...furry.
- rabbit...eat carrots a lot!
- mouse...they’re fast
- polar bear...they have warm fur, like to play in the snow and so do I.
- cheetah...fastest animal in the world.
- bear...because it can growl.

The teachers had an opportunity to share their experiences with other staff in the district at an evening sharing session, where they presented a Power Point presentation.

Checking: “Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one’s actions.” (First Peoples Principles of Learning, FNEESC). We noticed that the children’s self regulation increased through playful storytelling with various materials and through the use of the talking circle. Over time, the children were able to sit for longer periods of time, listen respectfully to others’ comments, questions, and ideas, and became more competent at expressing their thoughts orally. The talking circle caused a shift in the climate of the classroom, including the use of other space such as the library. The children’s play at the beginning of this experience showed that the children were just learning to share materials. At the end of the experience, we noticed that the children were more intuitive about how to share, calmer, more patient, and more in tune with each others’ needs. During the talking circle, while colours and textures were introduced, the children were respectful, kind, thoughtful and were completely engaged in the circle even though they were sitting for a long period of time. Our Early Learning Teacher Consultant commented on their collaborative skills and patience. During our “ending circle”, the children were able to express their learning and what was meaningful to them, without worrying about being “right” and the children were very proud of themselves. The children expressed love toward their elders (teachers and families) spontaneously and authentically. We felt that the Indigenous infused Principles could be created through the talking circle. The children have shown their familiarity with Indigenous animals and their idea of “place” through incorporating language into their daily play (i.e. Fraser river, salmon).

We are noticing that this process has been cyclical and are finding more natural ways of incorporating the spiral of inquiry.

Reflections/Advice:

- It was wonderful to collaborate and teach with another teacher (Teacher and Teacher-Librarian).
- We both really enjoyed the sharing, planning and teaching together.
- We attended professional development activities together which made them even more beneficial.
- Release days were wonderful, not having to rush.
- Incorporating the talking circle, relating to Indigenous culture, as well the children became more patient and were better able to listen to their peers (relating to the First Peoples Principles).
- Children's comments became more specific, reflective and insightful over the course of the year.
- Children gained confidence.
- Children were joyful and thoroughly enjoyed all activities, and variety of activities.
- Art work became more sophisticated. Opportunities to work with different materials: painting rocks, watercolour pencil crayons, wet felting, paint.
- Carry over to the classroom and back to the library.
- Children developing collaborative skills, ability to share materials, exposure to working together, creating stories, and telling stories.
- Becoming more comfortable with the First Peoples Principles of Learning and authentic Indigenous resources.
- Increased library collection of Indigenous resources, for use by the whole school.
- Opportunities to learn from other teachers, through observations in other classrooms.
- Nice to work in the library. Children viewed this as another learning space.
- We will be continuing our collaboration next year.
- Opportunity to give children the time and space they need.
- Ability to document learning more easily with two teachers.
- This experience was transformative!