



2015-2016 AESN Case Study

School: Nala'atsi

District: #71 Comox Valley

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Our focus for this year: Bridging the isolation that both Aboriginal students and Elders often feel in our community.

Scanning: Up to coming to our program, many of our students have not had experiences with positive Aboriginal role models. As that is one of the principles listed on the First Peoples Principles of Learning poster that has a prominent place in our classroom, we felt that it would be a good opportunity to connect our students with the Elders at the local Friendship Centre who are such positive role models in our community. We had done a similar project last year and both Elders and students had found the experience very rewarding.

Focus: Students who have positive connections with Elders and other members from the Aboriginal community often have a better sense of who they are, are more comfortable doing cultural activities and usually do better academically and socially.

Hunch: We only have one full-time and one part-time teacher and cannot provide nearly enough support for our students. We were hoping that by having these positive role models in our school who were also participating in the cultural activities and sharing meals, that our students would feel more supported and interested in becoming involved.

New professional learning: We planned a cultural activity and lunch every Thursday during the school year to which Nala'atsi students, staff, Elders and interested members from the Aboriginal community were invited. Although only able to come in one day a month, the menus were overseen by our dietitian, Kim Black, who works for Aboriginal Health.

After the lunch, which the participants took turns helping with, the participants would enjoy a cultural activity. These activities ranged from making medicine bags, mini button blankets, moccasin vamps (to honour the missing and murdered Aboriginal women), traditional teas and willow gathering for dream catchers. We also used a donated Elk hide to build our first school drum which will be used to welcome in this year's graduates. Another popular activity was the designing of masks for our Stories through Masks session. This activity proved to be so popular, that the Aboriginal staff in Prince George contacted me and asked me to come up and offer the Stories through Masks Workshop to the staff and Elders in their community in January 2016.

A book has been produced from the many recipes that the staff, students and visitors cooked over the year and will be given out to all participants with the hope that these healthy and low cost meals will become favorites in their own homes.

Finally, many questions relating to health, wellness and food arose during our lunchtime discussions. We decided to use those topics for students to research for our Annual Healthy Living Fair. There were over 30 topics which ranged from: Sugar in Junk-food, Why Salt is Bad for you, The Benefits of the Eating Salmon, Healthy snacks for Teenagers, Brain Food, Benefits of Cranberries, Herbal Teas, What is Good about Coconut Oil, Tobacco Awareness, Five Reasons

to Ban Bottled Water, Ten Healthy Drinks instead of Pop, Helping with FASD and the Ten Healthiest foods on the Planet to name just a few. Over 50 people showed up for our Fair, and we served salmon and tuna smoked in our own smokehouse, seaweed, cheese and crackers, fresh fruits and vegetables, healthy dessert bars and herbal teas.

Taking action: We started in September by inviting Aboriginal community members and Elders from the local Friendship Centre to attend a lunch and cultural activity. We only had two Elders show up but with the staff and students who were there, we enjoyed an afternoon collecting seeds for next year's planting in our garden. Over the following weeks we continued to invite people to come to a lunch and cultural event. We learned quickly that it was important to announce the event at the weekly Elders lunch so that people could make arrangements to attend. We also tried to keep the lunch simple, listing the ingredients for people with food allergies and have the recipes available for those people who wanted to try making the meal at home. One unexpected activity happened when we received an Elk hide from one of our students' parents. The participants ended up turning the hide into a large drum which this year will be used to usher in this year's graduates! We have also made cedar roses which will be presented to each Aboriginal graduate in our district. Along with the sharing which happened between the participants during lunch, the cultural activity connected our students with many caring adults in the Aboriginal community. The cultural activities included such events as: harvesting seeds, drying herbs, making tea, baking, leather key chains, sweat lodge teachings, corn husk dragon flies, medicine bags, dream catchers, cedar head bands moccasins and cedar book marks. We also had a drumming event every month and the students are learning new songs every month. We did the ever popular Stories through Masks activity which we have done for the last four years. Along with designing a mask each participant wrote a piece that told the story of that mask. The masks and stories were then displayed around the school and have added to the beauty of our school.

Checking: At the end of April, we did a check in with the entire group and asked for their comments about the year's activities. All of the comments were positive and there were many suggestions which came up for next year's activities. Knowing about next year's activities will allow us to be better organized!

Reflections/Advice: We will continue to offer lunches and cultural activities next year for our students, Elders and community members. We have been given a slightly bigger food budget next year and have applied for another grant which will allow us to buy more food and pay for more supplies for our activities. We continue to invite suggestions from our participants about the types of activities and events that they would like us to offer.

We feel that by doing these activities we are following the true spirit of the First Peoples Principles of Learning; we connect and encourage the formation of positive relationships, we recognize the role of indigenous knowledge, we involve generations and we explore our identity through enjoyable activities and presentations.