

2015-2016 AESN Case Study

School: Pineridge Elementary School District: #52 Prince Rupert

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Our focus for this year: We wanted to focus on improving resiliency among our students through focusing on pro-social/kindness activities, both giving and receiving kindness through working with a buddy class, and incorporating cultural learning.

Scanning: What did we notice in the fall?

Students in our combined grade 2 and 3 class appeared to be easily distressed over little things, and a difficulty to 'bounce back' from minor setbacks. We noticed emotional breakdowns over incidences that we would not usually expect to see at this grade level.

Focus: *Pro-social behaviours and cultural learning to improve resiliency.*In our combined grade 4 and 5 class we began a project we called "The Friendship Project' in an attempt to engage students in pro-social behaviours. Students were asked to make observations about what they saw on the playground at recess. We noticed that while some students were enthusiastically in favour of participating in the project, a number of students were not, as was noted in their initial journal entries about The Friendship Project.

Hunch: What did we wonder?

We wondered if this was showing us a need for developing resiliency in students. We also wondered if continued learning about culture would boost resiliency.

New professional learning: Teacher book club and collaborating and planning sessions when the classes were joined together and students were working with their buddies.

In our school we have a 'book club' that meets approximately every two weeks to study together something we want to support our students with developing. We chose this year to focus on resiliency. One of the most important parts we learned is that we can develop resiliency in children by engaging them in pro-social behaviours. We went to the regional NOII/AESN meeting mid-year and learned from another project about high school teachers combining an older grade with a younger grade to work on a Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) project collaboratively in order to boost social skills in their students.

Taking action: Using buddies to do the 2 x 10 Social and Emotional connecting strategy and to do problem solve in groups while working on open ended STEM projects.

We got the two classes together for an initial meeting, and formally assigned a buddy for a student from the other class. The older students were asked to meet their buddy at recess and learn some things about their new buddy and record what they learned about their younger buddy. The resulting responses greatly surprised us! The students very enthusiastically wrote about their younger buddy, including those who initially weren't that interested in the project. The students also wrote a great deal – some students who hadn't written much before suddenly had a lot to say! We were equally surprised and pleased with the responses from the

younger students. A class meeting was held to talk about how recess went with their younger buddies and the students were happy and excited, and a couple of students that had previously not participated to a great extent in class discussions were raising their hands to share how it went for them. We were off to a great start!

At one of our staff meetings we were discussed the 2 x 10 strategy as a way to connect with students we were concerned about. The feeling was that many students could benefit from this strategy. The grade 4 and 5 students were taught the strategy as part of The Friendship Project and they were encouraged to meet and connect with their buddies at recess.

We were intrigued by the idea of having a focus for meetings with the buddies so we wanted to try doing STEM activities, that we learned about at the Regional NOII/AESN meeting, with the buddy classes together each week. One of our teachers had read an article that described the benefit of less structured play on resiliency, and wanted to try having open ended activities with the buddies to provide opportunities for students to communicate, problem solve, and make decisions with an open ended activity. We set up a weekly schedule for the STEM buddy projects. The students in both settings were very highly engaged in the activities, and while the projects did not always get completed as they were meant to, all students had the opportunity to practice social skills with their buddy.

Checking: Have we made enough of a difference?

Teacher observations, student comments at the ending of STEM buddies, and journal entries have shown us that yes, we have seen a reduction in the emotional outbursts by students and more engagement in helping others. We saw improved social skills, a greater control over emotions, more independent playing by themselves, and less 'crying at the drop of a hat'. In the older students we noticed the grade 4 and 5 students were more willing to help other children, they are very good with the younger students, and when they were with their buddies they really liked it. When students were told that the Buddy projects were over for the year, one student that was reluctant to do The Friendship Project shared his disappointment by stating: "Really? Buddies are over?"

Reflections/Advice: Teacher reflections and thoughts for continuing

- This was good for me but it was exhausting, it meant I had to give up control
- Possible factors in the growth of students' resiliency:
 - Student buddies
 - o Developmental growth
 - Class lessons/literacy focus on kindness/growth
 - School wide focus on kindness
- In the end only one student out of each class didn't engage in the activity
- Next year ideas:
 - o students could write biographies of each other
 - it will be interesting to see how the younger students do as the older buddy