



## 2015-2016 AESN Case Study

**School:** Squamish Elementary

**District:** #48 Sea to Sky

**Inquiry Team Members:** Shawna Wagner

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**Our focus for this year:** To build community and belonging at the school with a focus on joining the French and English programs.

**Scanning:** I focused on the first key question of having two adults in the school setting who believe in you (the student) and feel that you are going to succeed initially. I first noticed a school with many different programs running and little connection to place with the students and teachers. I was concerned about the individual student's connection to the school and to different people in the school community. I was hoping to help teach and have the students understand the importance of community and belonging and that they are part of the process of creating and building the community. In being part of creating and building the community they are furthering their learning and helping themselves understand where they are going next with their learning.

I used these questions mostly for my own learning and for questioning where I was in the process. I initially had to find other caring adults to work with and then I was able to ask myself where I was going with my learning and find out how it was going.

**Focus:** I was hoping to have the students at the school not initially identify as an English or French student and to create individual belonging to the school on a shared vision. I was hoping for the students to understand the concept of community and what the attributes of a positive and inclusive school community looks, sounds, and feels like. I was hoping to extend this process to the whole school in a visual format of a circle of what a community looks, sounds, and feels like.

**Hunch:** The English and French students traditionally learned separately and did not join together. There was an assumption that they did not play together at recess and like they were two completely different programs learning completely differently.

**New professional learning:** The team of colleagues that I worked closely with were the most useful resources for me. A truly collaborative teacher team provided different ideas and also similar learning and wonderings. Together the team was able to bring a larger amount of ideas and strategies to try and help the students learn in the areas we were working on.

**Taking action:** I ended up focusing on the inquiry with a team of four same grade teachers in both the English and French departments. We met every week with a focus to try and build community with our students and for our students to see themselves as learners. We first all created individual class community of learners posters that highlighted what a class community looks like, sounds like, and feels like. We then joined all of these ideas from the students and created one poster, one for each room. The kids all connected to the poster as they had all

helped create it and the elements included were from all four classrooms naturally creating a larger community bond. We surveyed the students about the class and school community at the beginning of this process.

We then began to look at more specific skills that we had all noticed the children (grade 1/ 2) needed for our learning to go deeper. We made similar posters together so that all students no matter what classroom they were in would recognize and understand. They had pictures so that even if it was in French the English students understood it.

After spending a significant time mixing the students with different activities and with a purpose to build community and learn together we were able to go deeper with a focus on First Nations ways. We invited artists into our room and all did similar cultural activities. We made personal connections to animals and connected this to the community and environment. This was an exciting part of the inquiry and many other classrooms not involved included themselves and did similar activities.

At the end of the year we surveyed the students on how they felt about the class and school community. We also asked them if they knew how many adults they thought cared about them and if they made new friends in the French or English classes this year. The results were very exciting as the sense of community rose and the understanding of community was much larger. The students as a whole felt connected to the school and also said that they made new friends and played with them at recess because of the continual mixed learning opportunities.

**Checking:** The difference felt in community in the four classes involved was very evident with the data results, the learning, and the engagement from the students. The students were able to articulate the learning in many different settings due to similar language and visuals provided.

It would be nice to see similar actions in different grade levels. I was satisfied with what I was able to achieve with my team and would love to continue a similar process next year. I hope that it can be infused to other teams in the school as well to create an even larger sense of shared community. Many other teachers were interested and through our learning and sharing the excitement seems to be extending to others.

**Reflections/Advice:** I learned that the French program is working on some of the same challenges that I am. I learned that working collaboratively as a productive team is meaningful and rewarding. I learned that to create community and belonging it takes continued effort and conversation. It also involves talking about the challenging parts of community.

I plan to continue to create community in a meaningful way with as many classes that want to participate. I also would like to continue to go deeper with Aboriginal ways of learning, being, and doing so that students naturally connect to this topic matter. I would offer advice to just go with it and struggle through the hard bits in working in meaningful collaboration as the results are truly rewarding.