



## 2015-2016 AESN Case Study

**School:** Valleycliffe Elementary

**District:** #48 Sea to Sky

**Inquiry Team Members:** Pam Bourdon

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**Our focus for this year:** We focused on improving student listening skills.

**Scanning:** All of our teachers had expressed concern about student listening skills during staff and collaboration meetings. A few teachers were already using circle learning in their classrooms and shared that they felt it was making a difference with their students. Other staff showed an interest in incorporating circle into their daily routine and wanted input about how this could be done.

**Focus:** We selected this area because we felt that many of our students were simply hearing the voices of teachers and other students and not truly listening to the meaning attached. Students could sit and appear to be listening and maintain eye contact with the speaker, but would not be able to tell you what the person had said or make a connection to the speaker.

**Hunch:** Our hunch was that many students have had to listen/hear too much and don't often have an opportunity to speak aloud and be heard in their classroom setting on a daily basis. This had not provided students with firsthand knowledge of what it is like to actually be listened to and have others provide feedback and connections to their thoughts and ideas.

**New professional learning:** We explored the ideas and concepts around circle learning and how to make circle a part of our everyday teaching/learning (specifically, Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing).

**Taking action:** All of the teachers in the school agreed to try using circle in their classrooms at a level that they were comfortable with. Carpets were purchased or borrowed so that each room had a circle area available. Many teachers participated in the Well Ahead circle project and did check-ins and student assessments of the circle process. We met and discussed how circle was making a difference in our classrooms during staff and collaboration meetings, as well as informal discussions in the staffroom.

**Checking:** The differences were noticeable and the children's feedback showed that they felt more like they belonged and that their voices were being heard in their classroom communities. Teachers felt that the process was valuable and that many students were more able and likely to make connections and give feedback to other students who spoke aloud during circle. Even children who chose not to speak during circle gave feedback that showed that they were engaged and enjoyed listening to others during circle time.

**Reflections/Advice:** We learned that by providing students with the opportunity, on a daily basis, to speak from the heart, be heard by their learning community and listen actively to their classmates, they felt more like they belonged and had a voice. This made them more likely to

engage in active listening that allowed them to make connections and share their thoughts and ideas in a safe and supportive setting.

We plan to continue this process in the coming school year and explore other kinds of learning/sharing circle learning. In September we hope to support any new staff who are not familiar with the circle process so that they can make it a part of their daily classroom routine.

Our advice would be to make sure that teachers choose to be a part of this process by choice and that no one feels forced to use it. That way, everyone is comfortable and feels supported at whatever level of use they pursue.