



Networks of Inquiry and Innovation Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network

2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

School Name: Cultural Journeys and Garibaldi Highlands Elementary

School District: SD#48 Sea to Sky

Inquiry Team Members: Naomi Radawiec, Km Lowe, April Lowe

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Type of inquiry: NOII

Grade levels: Intermediate (4 - 7)

Curricular area(s): Applied Design, Skills & Technology, Arts Education, Career Education, Language Arts - Literacy, Language Arts - Oral Language, Language Arts - Reading, Language Arts - Writing, Mathematics / Numeracy, Physical & Health Education, Social Studies

Focus area(s): Aboriginal understandings (for example, Traditional Knowledge, oral history, reconciliation), Community-based learning, Core competencies (for example, critical thinking, communication, problem solving), Experiential learning, First Peoples Principles of Learning, Indigenous pedagogy, Inquiry-based learning, Land, Nature or Place-based learning, Social and emotional learning

In one sentence, what was your focus for the year?

For this inquiry we focused on connectedness, service Learning, reconciliation (with a focus on Skwxwú7mesh language and culture), and the competency "contribute." We believe that strong communities are the result of being connected and working together toward common goals.

Our big idea for this inquiry aligns with the big idea at Cultural Journeys this year: "We are all connected (to ourselves, to each other, and to this place)." Through this inquiry we are helping students build agency through self-discovery and connecting school communities. How can we work together to create a positive change and contribute to our community?

Scanning: Briefly summarize your scanning process. How did you use the four key questions as part of the scanning process? What did you notice about the experiences of your learners that were most important to your team?



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Garibaldi Highlands Elementary and Cultural Journeys School joined together in the fall of 2015 to begin "The Friendship Project" with the intention of helping students....

- make new friends
- learn how to host others (take care of our guests)
- learn more about themselves (self-discovery)
- appreciate others for their unique characteristics
- and to learn about other cultures (e.g. teaching others about First Nations culture)

In the first year, we felt that we made a difference by bringing the two school communities together. Children made friendships with students who they otherwise might have not known. They learned more about First Nations culture and ways of knowing, being and doing. Both communities gained new perspectives and respect for cultures different from their own. Students from Garibaldi Highlands deepened their understanding of First Nations culture and developed empathy for residential school survivors.

Last year building community within two schools helped us realize that we needed to take this project a step further. The students in both buildings had independently been asking how they could contribute to those in need. Many of our students have a desire to give back and we want to be able to afford them an opportunity to do so.

During the scanning phase we also thought about what our community needs from us? What can we do to contribute to our community? What are our areas of need? Who are the people we should connect with? Students decided that it was important to connect with Elders/Seniors in Squamish. We have a lot to learn from our Elders and often do not get enough time together with them. We noticed the need for intentional building of connections amongst students and Elders.

Focus: In a few sentences, explain why you selected this area. What changes were you hoping to obtain for your learners?

Our focus was to build on what we started last year during our Friendship Project with GHE and Cultural Journeys School. In order for students to internalize the big idea "we are all connected," it seemed appropriate to move outward and begin making connections within our local community together.

We focused on the following big ideas, enduring understandings, and competencies

- Stewardship
- Contribute, being agents of change



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- Building relationships
- Contributing to community helps us become more connected.
- Working together to make a difference in our community helps bring us together
- Together we can affect positive change for our community

Hunch: Describe your hunches about the ways in which practices at the school may have been contributing to the experiences of your learners that were of concern to you.

The children in Squamish usually socialize within their local area even on community sports teams. We believe that there is a need to build relationships amongst students within the different areas in order to promote a deeper understanding and awareness of the diverse cultures that make up Squamish.

We (the teachers) began discussing how to bridge the gap so that when these students end up all together in our single middle school they will understand the diversity within our community and not only accept each other for their differences (cultural or personality), but also remain connected as friends.

We noticed great diversity within the two schools and wondered about the potential learning that could emerge if students were able to gather together and participate in a variety of projects centered around building identity and community. Through this inquiry we hoped that children would develop critical thinking skills, understand that they have a voice, and realize that people will listen to their feelings and ideas. We used the First Peoples Principles of learning to guide our projects and planning.

In the past we have focused on self-discovery, identity, and connecting our two school communities. We have yet to take action and work together to affect positive change in the greater community. Our work has been primarily building friendships amongst each other. We haven't yet made strong and consistent connections with the Squamish Nation Elders. Some Elders have been invited into our schools on separate occasions, but we would like to bring the learning outside of the walls of the school.

New professional learning: What new areas of professional learning did you explore? What resources were most helpful? What specific designs did you use to support the learning of your colleagues?

For Professional learning we...

- read the literature about social responsibility, connectedness, stewardship, and service



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learning

- consulted and collaborated with our First Nations Language and Culture teacher
- learned as much as we could about how to incorporate Indigenous ways of - Knowing and learning into our everyday learning experiences
- learned about how to help students take ownership over being part of the truth and reconciliation process
- listened to the stories of Elders in our community and asked questions
- used the First Peoples Principles of Learning to guide our planning
- collaborated to plan for next steps and reflect on our learning
- used the SD48 Contribute continuum to help with planning
- contacted a teacher who had just finished her masters thesis focused on Service Learning
- social Responsibility Profiles from BC curriculum

Taking action: Describe strategies you and your team decided on and how your actions worked out.

We first concentrated on building a sense of community within our two schools (reconnecting after being apart for the summer, welcoming new students, bonding as a group). From there, we brainstormed ideas and took action in our local community.

In December the students reached out to the seniors in our community by building them a gingerbread replica of Squamish. The students had to work collaboratively to decide on materials, plan out their designs and make the gingerbread buildings. The buildings were gifted to Hilltop House, a seniors care home near Cultural Journeys School. Students wanted to make the seniors feel cared for and to brighten their spirits during the holiday season.

After the initial “act of kindness” (Gingerbread Squamish), we decided to reach out to multiple groups of Elders/seniors in our community. We met with the following three groups on two separate occasions: 1) Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Nation’s Totem Hall Elders, 2) Hilltop House Seniors, and 3) Squamish Seniors Hiking Group.

Students were split into three groups for the Elders visits. After a welcoming circle, they interviewed the Elders about the history and culture of Squamish. What makes this place special? What is the history here? How would you describe Squamish to visitors?

Students also asked the Elders about an artifact that would best represent the history of Squamish. In small groups the students created geocaches on our next visit. Inside each



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geocache they included a log book, pencil/pen, geocacher note, and artifacts that represent Squamish. You can google geocaching for more information on this fun outdoor pursuit:
<https://www.geocaching.com/play>

Each group of students participated in a weekly blog post where they discussed their strategies and ideas when they were not in the same building:
<http://friendshipproject2016.weebly.com/>. Students have responded to each other on the blog in text, but also sent each other vlog type videos as a way of communicating their learning. Teachers posted about our meetings on a class website to showcase the work we are doing: <http://cultural-journeys.weebly.com/friendship-project-year-two.html>. An elink.io digital portfolio was also created to document the work we are doing together for the Friendship project: <https://elink.io/p/the-friendship-project>

For our final day together we invited Elders and Seniors to join us in hiding our geocaches and to celebrate the connections that were made throughout this inquiry. We met at the Skwxwú7mesh Nation long house at Alice lake Provincial Park. This is a special place that Cultural Journeys students visit regularly. Fifteen geocaches were planted that day. Afterwards we celebrated around the fire, made bannock, played Skwxwú7mesh games and sang songs.

Checking: Summarize the differences you made. Were they enough? Were you satisfied?

We used the "contribute" continuum, interviewed students, looked at their blog posts, and observed their interactions throughout the inquiry. Yes, we believe that this inquiry made a difference! In the final interviews student reflections demonstrated an increase in connectedness between the two schools, and a deeper understanding of what it means to "contribute" to our local community. The students seemed committed to our purpose and were enthusiastic about getting together to create a positive impact on the community of Squamish.

Reflections/Advice: Finish by sharing what you learned from this inquiry, where you plan to go next, and what advice you would offer other schools with a similar interest.

This project feels authentic in that it has the potential to impact relationships. In year one the focus was friendship and now in year two the focus has been taking those friendships out into the community and witnessing if children can have an impact on elements within that community.



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The children themselves have built on the friendships from year one and although some of the children are different, there existed a familiarity between the two schools. The children were able to reconnect with the understanding that they would be working together throughout the year. The gingerbread project leading up to Christmas was an engaging hook. While we as teachers may have felt overwhelmed with the task that we took on at such a busy time of the year, the children were all in. The decision to share the project with the seniors at hilltop house allowed the students to feel the full impact of their contribution. The emphasis on their ability to contribute was a focus at each of our meetings.

After Christmas we wanted to strengthen the students connection with the community by further involving the seniors/elders of Sea to Sky. What could the seniors/elders bring to the project and what could children gift to them? Elders/seniors were able to bring historical knowledge and children were able to bring technological knowledge. The project became one that required both pieces. Teams of children worked together with the input from seniors to build a "geocache" that would have historical relevance. The resulting product exceeded our expectations and the involvement of seniors from our community added a piece that as teachers was out of reach for us. As often happens, the process, the journey evoked emotions and feelings of understanding that went far beyond the building of either the gingerbread houses or the geocache.