



Networks of Inquiry and Innovation Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network

2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

School Name: Dewdney Elementary

School District: SD#75 Mission

Inquiry Team Members: Susan McLeod, Brittany O'Rourke, Karina Zimmerman, Joann Lindahl

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Type of inquiry: AESN

Grade levels: Primary (K - 3), Intermediate (4 - 7)

Curricular area(s): Social Studies

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

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

Our focus is aboriginal perspectives and teaching in nature

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?

The scanning process began with our aboriginal survey. Our district has also developed a website for aboriginal education over the last two years in partnership with our elders, staff and community that was implemented this year. The four questions are linked to our aboriginal department survey - especially in the area of connected to the school and learning. The question "where are you going next with your learning" was the most important to our team because we focused this year on reconciliation using a nature experience and knew that when we engaged the students in this learning that it would open doors to questions, feelings and understanding. Several principles of learning were addressed - but our inquiry project especially zeroed in on "the learning is embedded in memory, history and story". The students planted a reconciliation garden, and we installed



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a teepee on site. This led to many learning opportunities around this principle of learning.

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

We selected this area as Mission has a residential school nearby. Hundreds of our educators were toured by local elders in a moving professional development day. We have a strong connection with our local elders and we felt our students and community needed to hear the stories of the past and the hopes for the future with the messages that were brought with truth and reconciliation.

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.

In the past, Dewdney has had little connection with aboriginal history and land. When I began as principal 6 years ago, I would hear comments that were not inclusive, kind or positive. As an educator, I have a strong belief in the power of education to influence attitudes and perspectives. I had a hunch that if we provided positive learning opportunities for students and their families, that we may be able to move towards more positive relationships within our community.

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?

We explored residential schools and the history of teepees and other types of shelters that were used. We made models of teepees, learned about sweatlodges and mud huts. Tony at Mukwa teepees was a wonderful resource for all when we installed and took down the teepee. Brittany, our aboriginal Liaison conducted many lessons, engaged our aboriginal population both through art (painting stones of meaning around our teepee) and brought guests in to enhance the conversation around nature, the teepee and reconciliation. Our Grade 2/3 teacher, of Metis ancestry planted a reconciliation garden. Students learned about residential school and shared their thoughts in the form of a heart that rested beside their planting. She called this a "heart garden". The class had the opportunity to share with elders at a special ceremony at Hatzic rock, created a video (soon to be released) and sing a song " Make the World a Little Bit Better".

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



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worked out.

Planting the heart garden - The students learned about indigenous plants and their uses. They learned about residential schools and its effects. They had the opportunity to share their thoughts of care and compassion beside their plants. Each time the students watered, tended and observed their garden, they also remembered the stories, the place and the impact of residential schools. more importantly, it gave them an opportunity to consider how they could "make the world a little bit brighter". The aboriginal students and their families were uplifted and honoured at our school and in a district ceremony. This gave them the opportunity to share their learning beyond our little school. When the video is uploaded it will be a lasting legacy and reminder of the memories and stories. Using the garden as a vehicle to teach truth and reconciliation worked out brilliantly as the students were engaged, had purpose and created something beautiful.

Installation of the teepee - We could not have imagined the positive outcome of this project. Although there was a cost involved, the students had a visual reminder of heritage and culture. The most poignant moment was when a residential school survivor shared how meaningful this was to him and how "teaching and honouring First Nations culture in the school is what reconciliation means to me". To this day, it brings a tear to my eye when I read that. The impact on the students was immediate. Our CANOE magazine did a write up which I have scanned and attached that describes the students' perspectives on that day. Indigenous plants and their uses - our aboriginal liaison and Grade 3 teacher did some teaching in the uses of the plants. We could not find wapato yet, but are still looking. The students love learning about the plants, the wetland and being out in nature. It connects them with each other and the land. We think we can do a better job in teaching and learning about indigenous plants. This will be a focus for next year.

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

We began this inquiry thinking that we were going to focus on indigenous plants and their uses. As the year progressed, reconciliation and truth became the focus. Somehow things morphed and evolved and became a richer learning experience that what we could have "planned. Our students understand the impact of residential schools - they had little or no knowledge before, aboriginal education is woven into conversations and lesson plans rather than a "separate unit". They showed compassion and understanding and an enthusiasm to share their learning and make a difference themselves.

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.



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If you can have Tony from Mukwa teepees come even for a day, your students will have a rich day of learning and truth. Engaging the students in nature activities connects them with the land and provides opportunities for deep conversations. Share all you do with families, community and district. This instills pride in the students and their families. We learned that even though our inquiry took a different turn, we went with it and the results were life changing. We learned that by not trying to control what we do but allowing learning to evolve and run with it is really the essence of inquiry based learning. We are all learning together.