



## Networks of Inquiry and Innovation Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network

### 2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

**School Name:** Hatzic Elementary

**School District:** SD#75 Mission

**Inquiry Team Members:** Vivian Searwar (Vice-Principal & Grade 4/5 Teacher); Leslie Jensen (Aboriginal Cultural Worker); Joann Davis (Grade 2 Teacher); Judy McAulay (Grade 3 Teacher); Julie Brown (Teacher-Librarian)

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**Type of inquiry:** AESN

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

**Curricular area(s):** Language Arts - Literacy, Language Arts - Oral Language, Physical & Health Education, Science, Social Studies

**Focus area(s):** Aboriginal understandings (for example, Traditional Knowledge, oral history, reconciliation), Experiential learning, First Peoples Principles of Learning, Flexible learning, Indigenous pedagogy, Land, Nature or Place-based learning

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

This year we will focus on the following First People's Principle of Learning: Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place) and its connection with exploration of nature and stewardship with mindfulness and health & well-being.

**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?

We surveyed our students and realized that few select students participate in school sport activities (Running Club, Sports Teams). We also feel that our students are weak in their knowledge of physical literacy. Although some of the students are involved in community-based sports, most times they are fairly structured sport activities, with many of them being held inside a building (gym, arena). Many families tend to spend much of their "free" time running from one structured activity to another and as a result, do not



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have time to experience the outdoors with their children (unless they make it a priority). Additionally, those students who do not participate in after school sports or community sports, spend much of their time indoors, which typically involves entertainment by way of technology.

After reflecting on the student's responses, the following themes emerged: Students believe that their teachers believe in them and support them by helping them learn, by "making them feel happy inside", by "being confident even when I think it's not good enough" and by "helping me get the idea". Students were also easily able to articulate what they are learning and how they feel they are doing and were able to give a reason why they feel this way. Students were also easily able to share what they would like to learn, but had some difficulty knowing how to go about it. Most of the answers concentrated on school subject areas, with only a couple students who spoke about learning playground games, which could be a reflection on how the fact that students view school primarily as an indoor place of learning. With this in mind, our hope is to extend this view by bringing the "outdoors back into schools".

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

There is a growing body of research that claims that children are not spending enough time outside and their daily consumption of media and screen time has increased. Research also indicates that children receive positive physical, mental and social health benefits from playing outside. The fact that children are spending much of their time indoors could potentially adversely affect their growth in these areas. As teachers, we see an increase in the number of students with anxiety, aggression, poor attention and management of life challenges.

We also know that survival of traditional Aboriginal communities depended on physical, mental and social strengths of the group, as well as knowledge about the use of nature's resources. With this in mind, we are wondering how the change from an "outdoor" society to an "indoor" society has affected today's children, and more specifically their capacity to learn.

Our big questions are: How might an increase in nature and place-based activities influence and strengthen a child's overall health and well-being? And what will be the impact (if any) on his/her attitudes and success at school?

Our hope was to open our doors to another learning environment (the outdoors), which would eventually lead to improved physical and mental well-being as well as community stewardship.



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**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.

Schools have traditionally been an indoor place of learning. And, changing the public's view of what schools should be like is not an easy task. Deborah Meier states in her book *The Power of Ideas*, "We cannot pass on to a new generation that which we do not ourselves possess!". In order to reinvent schooling, we need to change our mindset, but this can only be achieved through collective co-ownership, involving students, parents and educators.

**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 purchased some teacher resources (such as *The Last Child in the Woods & The Essential Guide to A Nature-Rich Life* by Richard Louv, *Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature* by Job Young et al, *First Nations Science & Ethnobotany Unit (SD #72)*, *Teach, Breathe, Learn: Mindfulness in and out of the Classroom* by Mreena Srinivasan) for teachers.

Our Kindergarten teachers attended a workshop on the benefits of outdoor learning. Our Vice-Principal attended the Aboriginal Run/Walk Leadership Training Session (SportsMedBC) and information learned at the training (on Physical Literacy, Nutrition and Mindfulness and resources) was shared with the staff.

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

We applied for a Winter Wellness Grant through SportsMedBC and planned a school-wide walk/Nordic walk through the neighbouring park as a precursor to our planned 5 km spring/walk.

We planned a school-wide 5km Aboriginal Walk/Run for our entire school community (parents included) in spring 2017. Grant monies were used to purchase necklaces and tokens that students would receive once they achieved certain milestones. Students were encouraged to demonstrate the teachings of the Seven Grandfather Teachings throughout the run club program. These teachings connected closely to our school-wide Eagle Feather program, which is based on the Seven Grandfather Teachings of love, respect, truth, wisdom, courage, humility and honesty.



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A couple teachers organized a year-round hiking club and mountain biking club. Participating students were able to explore nearby parks and trails. Several teachers also took advantage of our raised bed gardens – we planted various flowers and vegetables. One class participated in the Planting a Promise (daffodil) and Spuds 'n Tubs (potato) programs through the Agriculture in the Classroom and another participated in the Veggilicious program offered through out local Communities in Bloom. Our Vice-Principal, with the support of the Aboriginal Department (Siwal Si'Wes), organized a school-wide visit to Xa:ytem, a local traditional Stó:lō site to experience storytelling and weaving. Many classes did in-depth study on the Stó:lō culture.

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

Throughout the year, our students were offered a multitude of outdoor activities both at school (during instructional time) as well as after school (extra-curricular). We feel that we helped to enrich our students' physical literacy learning as well as opened opportunities to them that they may not have experienced prior to this.

For example, students looked forward to doing the 10 minute run/job/walk every day. Not only did it serve as a physical brain break, but it also encouraged participation in running and walking. Students reaped the positive health benefits from this program. Many of our students placed very well at the district track meet this year (compared to other years) and we think that it may have been in part due to the fact that our students had been practicing routinely (10 minutes per day for a minimum of three times per week from April 1, 2017 onward). Students were now able to articulate that they enjoyed participating in these outdoor activities and that it is part of their overall learning at school.

We also felt that the outdoor visit to Xa:ytem offered the students a deep place-based experience and that they came away having a better sense of the importance of the land to the Sto:lo people.

**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.

We learned that good learning can happen both indoors and outdoors, and sometimes the outdoor learning can be just as (and oftentimes more) productive than indoor learning. Our hope is to continue this inquiry next year, especially in the area of mindfulness (which we did not delve into this year). We also hope to start serious plans for the construction of our outdoor Indigenous garden. The advice we would offer to other schools is to take your students outside regularly explore the learning nature provides!