



## **Networks of Inquiry and Innovation** **Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network**

### **2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study**

**School Name: Richmond School District**

**School District: SD#38 Richmond**

**Inquiry Team Members: Leanne McColl, Marie Ratcliffe**

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**Type of inquiry: AESN**

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

**Curricular area(s): Not applicable**

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

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

**Meeting the goals of our new Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement**

**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?**

**In our scanning phase, our Aboriginal Success Team asked the four questions of students with whom they were working. We were very pleased with their comments. All the students found it easy to name adults who were supportive and who believed that they would be successful. We enjoyed quotes that indicated the thoughtfulness of their answers, such as, "They help when needed and congratulate me when I accomplish something," and "We ask for permission and they let us make choices." All students saw school as a place that had meaning for them, and as a place that would help them to achieve their future goals. All students felt that they were on an upward trajectory with their learning, that they were improving as they were maturing, and that they had some ideas about what they could do in order to improve further. One student responded with, "We are learning positive growth mindset, do not keep yourself down... if you can't do something, tell yourself you can and learn how - it is important because you will progress."**



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All students had goals for the future, ranging from “trying new things”, to “a dream job.”

In terms of scanning specifically for this particular professional inquiry, we revisited our experience last year when, in the spring of 2016, our department took a group of students with Aboriginal ancestry from different schools out on a field trip experience to Jericho Beach for a day of enjoying nature, and learning about medicinal plants from Métis herbalist, Lori Snyder. A great day was had by all, as many connections were made in terms of learning and personal relationships, and we wanted to provide a similar experience for this year’s students.

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

As a district, we recently signed our second Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement in February, 2017. We are now working towards our new goals as a district. Our district’s new enhancement agreement is made up of 4 goals. The first three goals are as follows:

**Goal #1:**

Richmond’s students with Aboriginal ancestry will work toward a strong sense of belonging through pride in their cultural heritage. Students will be honoured for their stories, celebrated for their individual strengths, and supported throughout their learning journey.

**Goal #2:**

The community of learners and educators in the Richmond School District will engage in the meaningful process of reconciliation through education by developing an understanding and respect for the histories, cultures, and worldviews of Aboriginal communities, beginning with the First Peoples of this place.

**Goal 3:**

All students in Richmond will have opportunities to gain an understanding of self, community, land, spirits, and ancestors through education that honours the First Peoples Principles of learning.

As a part of our Enhancement Agreement, schools are requested to participate in professional inquiries which will utilize the spiral of inquiry model, and which will work towards one or more of the goals of the EA. In order to demonstrate this undertaking, this inquiry worked towards addressing the first three goals of our EA.



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**As a driving question for this inquiry we asked: how can an immersive cultural workshop day that honours the First Peoples Principles of Learning foster a sense of belonging, and give students a better understanding of the First Peoples of this place?**

**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.**

**We believe that there is great potential in our Enhancement Agreement for teachers to be inspired by and commit to goals that will be beneficial for students with Aboriginal ancestry, as well as all students. In gathering data for our new Enhancement Agreement, we found that many teachers were unaware of the existence of the Agreement, let alone its goals. Our intention as an Aboriginal Education department is to model our commitment to working the goals in our daily work. We also intend to increase the profile of our Enhancement Agreement in our district, so that all Richmond teachers and schools know the goals of the Agreement, and are working towards them in their own contexts.**

**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 have been reading new publications such as: Gloria Snively and Lorna William's Knowing Home, Braiding Indigenous Knowledge with Western Science, FNEESC's Science First Peoples, and Jo-ann Archibald and Jan Hare's Learning, Knowing, Sharing, Celebrating Successes in K-12 Aboriginal Education in British Columbia.**

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

**On May 10, 2017, three members from our department, Sonja Bone (Aboriginal Success elementary teacher), Terry Point (Aboriginal Success elementary worker), and I (Aboriginal Teacher consultant), took a group of 12 students with Aboriginal ancestry from three different Richmond schools for a field trip. We began at UBC Botanical Gardens, where we opened the day with a traditional welcoming to the territory by Terry Point, a Musqueam knowledge keeper. Our group of students was almost outnumbered by the educators who gathered with us to learn from Terry, including UBC garden tour leaders, and teacher candidates. With so many additional people who had come to join us, it felt as though we**



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were part of a worthy expedition. Together, we explored the gardens, learning much about the plants of the gardens, and especially about traditional plants and their uses. We sampled licorice fern, whose name puzzled the students, as they claimed they could not detect any licorice taste whatsoever. At another stop, Terry showed us how to harvest and eat the stalks of salmonberry bushes and explained the Musqueam use of this plant. One of the students exclaimed, "I want to make pie out of this!" We then went on a canopy walk which tested students' courage as we climbed high above the ground. After lunch in an open space at UBC, we played a traditional game of slahal to test the students' guessing prowess. And then, because we happened to be near the newly raised UBC Reconciliation Pole, we were honoured to have an impromptu talk from Haida hereditary chief and master carver Jim Hart, who was putting the finishing touches on his art. He spoke about the meaning of the pole and how its details emphasized the need for reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Following this, we went to the new UBC forestry building to meet with Dr. Lori Daniels, professor in the UBC Forest and Conservation Sciences Department, where we got a tour of the building which also housed the replica Haida canoe, Looplex X. We then went up to a lab to learn about different trees, and how they age, and how researchers determine their age from "cookies".

Our day was very full. As an adult helping to lead the day, I came away with a sense of the power in numbers. There were many hands and voices which contributed to the students' learning during the day. A "village" worked together on this day, with each person having a different experience and piece of wisdom to pass on. At the end of the day, students were asked to share a message of gratitude, and our youngest student said, "I just liked being here with all of you."

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

In order to assess our hunch, students participating in the day completed pre- and post-surveys. The pre-survey questions related to students' level of connection to their Aboriginal ancestry, and their understandings about local First Peoples. The post-survey questions measured the change in their responses to the questions in the pre-survey, and also asked a question about the level of their desire to connect with other students with Aboriginal ancestry.

In answer to the pre-survey question, "When you think of your Aboriginal ancestry, what words or thoughts come to mind?", most students were able to respond. Student answers included, "not a lot of people these days are Aboriginal", "family, happy, connected", "I know stories", "spiritual", and "I care about it. I am proud of my ancestry because I like it".



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Overall, students were quite positive in their views. In regards to their knowledge of local First Peoples, many students did not have much to say. However, those students who did answer the question had some definite opinions about colonization, such as, “they were treated badly, but they are wise and respected” and “Europeans stopped Aboriginals from being themselves”.

In considering the change in personal connection to Aboriginal ancestry from pre-field experience to post-field experience, where 1 was not connected at all, and 4 was very connected, 2.5 was the average level of connectedness pre-field experience, and 3.2 was the average level of connectedness post-field experience. This indicated that the overall students’ level of connectedness increased due to the field trip.

When asked what was learned during the day, student responses included statements such as, “I feel more connected [to my culture] with the stories that were told.” Although we hoped that students would have learned specific things about the local First Peoples, especially in light of the fact that they seemed to have little knowledge about these peoples prior to the field experience, it was the outdoor, land-based aspect of the day that made a greater impression upon the students.

Finally, when students were asked about whether it was important to them to connect to other students of Aboriginal ancestry, their answers included, “it’s cool to see other kids’ perspectives of how they see Aboriginal culture” and “I would like to do this again”.

Overall, the field trip was a very worthwhile experience. Students had a wonderful time with one another, bonding across differences in age, grade, school and background. Although we had students as young as 7 and as old as 13, they worked well together. Our oldest grade 7’s acted as role models for the younger students, especially in terms of participating and demonstrating pride in the cultural activities. During this field trip, students were given an opportunity to reflect upon their own identities as individuals with Aboriginal ancestry, deepening their connections to their cultural heritage, to the history of Aboriginal people in Canada, and to land. Students also connected to one another through this shared experience, and experienced a sense of a community. In terms of working specifically toward the goals of the Enhancement Agreements, quotes such as “I’ve learned that it’s fun being Aboriginal”, and “I think that I’ve learned more things about my culture” affirmed that the trip was successful in meeting its intentions.



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**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.**

**Although our day was rich in learning experiences, it was a lot to take in, even as an adult. It would better to have more than one day together so that we could honour the First Peoples Principle of Learning that learning takes patience and time.**

**We also felt that although it is more challenging to create an educational field trip relevant to many differently aged students, the decision to include students from many different grades was beneficial for the students. Siblings and cousins got opportunities to spend time together, and friendships were made across school boundaries.**

**While our Enhancement Agreement is meant to have students at its centre, as it certainly should, what was abundantly clear in our inquiry is how educators are transformed by working toward the goals. For future professional inquiries, we think that it is important to debrief with participating educators. Changes in teacher practice are further cemented with opportunities to reflect and discuss, and the changes that are inspired by personal experiences, such the one in which we took part, are key to reaching the goals of our Enhancement Agreement.**