

Our Journey

Reflection
by
Robert Smyth
Principal



On September 18, 2015 the culture of the Squamish People came

to life at Eastview Elementary School in North Vancouver. Our year long journey of awareness and understanding of Aboriginal ways was witnessed and celebrated through a presentation ceremony of our Welcome Figure. Over the year, every Eastview student contributed to the pole under the guidance of distinguished Aboriginal carvers Ses Siyam (Ray Natroaro), and apprentice Haat With Wayaanus (Josh Watts).

The Welcome Figure celebration resonated with the sounds of drumming and song and with the story of a community coming together with increasing acceptance, wisdom, and strength. Students brought tears to guests' eyes because of their maturity and respect for traditional Squamish protocol. Eastview students owned their learning throughout the experience. We were grateful for the unwavering support from Tsnomot, Brad Baker, District Principal of Aboriginal Education, and for the openness and wisdom of the Squamish Nation. It was an honour that Ketximtn, Alroy Baker,



Resonating with the sounds of drumming and song ...

led protocol; his leadership helped ground our community and added great meaning and texture.

“This belongs to Eastview now. It is your responsibility to take care of it. The man watches the doors and windows of the school, for everyone who comes and goes, so that no one here comes to any harm,” said Ketximtn.

The Welcome Figure celebration was the foundation needed to weave Aboriginal worldviews throughout our school learning community. It was an invitation for local First Nations communities to be an integral part of our school culture. Eastview is now recognized as a safe place for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to be together, making education better for all students.

In addition to the Welcome Figure project and celebration, we were honoured to welcome an Eastview parent, Wichone Humbe Luta, Darcy McDiarmid, from Trondek Hwechin and Nacho Nyak Dun First Nations North Central Yukon, who shared traditional teachings, setting the stage for positive change in our community. Entering classes, Darcy taught place-based history by giving students the opportunity to explore Indigenous plants on our school grounds, which included learning how to ask permission to pull the plants for the purpose of making medicine. This proved to be a very engaging experience and naturally led to more meaningful

collaboration.

Darcy’s continued reflections resulted in the creation of a beautiful eagle mural that involved students from every class. The mural was the foundation for our *Eagle Feather Gifting* initiative, which became a wonderful way to support positive behaviour. Teaching protocol and the significance of gifting the eagle feather was key to students recognizing each other’s successes. Darcy helped students recognize others for the positive impacts they are making at Eastview, encouraging us to celebrate each other.

Weaving Aboriginal practice to support positive behavioural change continued through implementing *Circles*. This process placed everyone affected by an incident in one circle to hear each other’s experiences. It involved support to problem solve, to repair relationships and to strengthen our school community. Students were brought together through the acknowledgement of Traditional Territory and through a common sense of place. Students truly appreciated that all voices were equal and that circle is sacred. This practice has been supported by The North Shore Restorative Justice *Circles in Schools Program*

and has been transformative.

“I wish we had more opportunity to do circle, it is quiet and calm,” said a grade three student.

“I feel like it changed my life, it made me realize that I am not a bad person,” said a grade seven student.

“I would like to thank the Coast Salish people for allowing us to have the circle today,” said another grade seven student.

“I felt very welcomed and safe,” said a grade four student.

To compliment *Circles*, we have introduced Slahal, a traditional Coast Salish Aboriginal game. Slahal, also known as the Bone Game, is a sacred practice, and a game of probability involving teams of one or more. Once one team has successfully predicted and collected all the Sticks, the game is finished and both teams agree to “let the problem go.” Ketximtn, Swalklanexw, Dallas Guss, First Nations Support Worker, and Francis Guerrero, Slahal Carver, led a school-wide assembly that included students from the Xwemelch’stn Etsimxwawtxw, Capilano Reserve Little One’s School. The authenticity of the event brought great meaning and new understandings for students and staff on how to use a game to solve problems in peaceful ways.

The Eagle Feather Gifting Initiative became a way to support positive behaviour.





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Infusing Aboriginal ways of knowing is an essential part of our school culture and is sparking open minds and open hearts. On Friday, March 10, 2017, we celebrated a six-week literacy and fine arts collaborative project with Little One's School. The project included instruction from community actors, writers

and artists including Xwalacktun, world renowned Aboriginal artist, and Jacquie Rolston, an Emily Carr Graduate. Staff and students from both schools recognized the power of this opportunity.

Consistent use of authentic Aboriginal voice is essential to moving forward with Indigenization our

school community. Using resources from Aboriginal authors, getting permission to share story, listening to our First Nations parents, and incorporating Aboriginal worldviews in ways that honour protocol and tradition, are all key to moving forward. We also recognize the importance of taking the time to understand our shared local history and teaching students about the legacy of Residential Schools.

In a presentation to Ketximtn, students demonstrated with great care and empathy their understanding of the impact of Residential Schools.

Alroy was gracious, saying, "If the Elders were here, they would be crying."

Working face-to-face with the members of our local First Nations communities has been transformative. We are proud of the influence our journey is having on others near and far. We will continue to share our story. 

U Siyem, Robert

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School website:

<http://www.sd44.ca/school/eastview/>

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