Land Based Learning
in
Aspen View Public Schools #78
Desmond Nolan
Principal of Edwin Parr School in Athabasca
Started Aspen View Land-Based Learning Program
Dianne Jewell

- Principal of Grassland School
- Helped with the daily programming for the land-based Division camp
Aspen View Public Schools or AVPS, is a regional and primarily rural school authority located north of Edmonton, Alberta. AVPS is 9.980 sq km in size.

- Large geographical area, Smith to Vilna
- Is made up of 9 schools, 3 Hutterite Brethren schools, and an outreach/off-campus/Virtual school.
- Diverse socio-economic population
- 2800 students with 700 self identified FNMI
- About 175 FTE
School Communities in Aspen View

- Boyle School
- Edwin Parr Composite School
- Grassland School
- H.A. Kostash School (Smoky Lake)
- Thorhild Central School
- Vilna School
How it started!!

- Achievement gap
- Diploma and PAT results
- Attendance
- Programming....different approaches
- Connecting with nature
Rational

• The Aspen View Land Based Learning Experience intended to introduce staff and students to an Indigenous paradigm of learning by engaging students at a deeper level of participation in which they live fully and consciously. The Land Based program is predicated upon a holistic lifestyle approach, utilizing four quadrants to acquire knowledge: physical, spiritual, cognitive and emotional. From opportunities such as paddling, nature walks, gathering medicinal herbs with Elders, meal preparation, crafts, combined with core curriculum classes instructed via cooperative methods; students use the ‘land as text’ as a means for experiential education.1

1  http://www.abcleaders.org/stories/634/dr-- peggy--wilson--and--dr--stan--wilson--land--based--education
The First Nations, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework

- The First Nations, Metis and Inuit Policy Framework guides educators as they strengthen knowledge and understanding of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives among all students; provide First Nations, Métis and Inuit learners with culturally relevant learning opportunities; and enhance reporting on the achievement of educational outcomes.

Our Goals

• Increasing Indigenous knowledge
• Developing Relationships
• Connecting with Nature
• Enhancing Curriculum
Increasing Indigenous knowledge

- Elders and knowledge keepers
- KAIROS Blanket Exercise
- Traditional cooking
- Hand games
- Indigenous medicinal plants
- Residential School teaching
- Indigenous crafts
- Storytelling
Developing Relationships

- Feeder schools/Different Schools
- Building strong peer relationships
- New relationships with staff/adults/Elders
- Relationships that we hope last their high school career
- Students stepping out of comfort zone
  - playing guitar, singing
Connecting with Nature

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PS3KoEjV6el
Even though we live in Northern Alberta, very few of our students had any prior connections or experience with the outdoors.

Experiential learning...learning by doing, also relates to curriculum enhancement.

Living in the outdoors for 5 days

Environmental stewardship and building on existing values

Forestry
Enhancing Curriculum

• English
  - students developed scripts based on the outdoors (based around camp) and then worked on creating a script from a text they had created.
  - this may also include pieces/lessons learned in storytelling

• Math
  - students worked on trigonometry and measured distances and points around camp. For example, students measured points around the shore of the lake, the teepee; as well as the distances between places in camp.

• Science
  - Students worked on physics and measured distance and time (Scott Gray and Henrik Asfeldt made a zip line for students)

• Social
  - FNMI history plays a great role in the grade 10 curriculum.
Science 10: Physics

Math 10: Triangulation

Former Superintendent of Aspen View Schools
Evolution of the program: Decolonizing curriculum

- The Indigenous Paradigm
  - Taking a colonial designed curriculum and looking at it through the Indigenous paradigm

Using Design Studies 1010 as a reflective tool.

Rationale

Since the dawn of man, people have gazed at the night sky with awe and wonder. The unbelievable beauty of the celestial bodies has been expressed in unique ways by all societies. For many, viewing the wonder of the galaxy is a deeply emotional and spiritual experience, a time to reflect and to contemplate one’s place in the universe. You are a participant of a camp on land that has been inhabited by Indigenous people for countless generations; throughout that time, members of the Cree society admired and honored the land and sky that is shared with you today. During this camp, you will have the opportunity to experience the land, water and sky through the perspective of the Cree people; the Elders will help guide you through this process.
The journey

• From small town Athabasca in rural Alberta, to the University of Saskatchewan
  - Indigenous Land-Based Learning Masters Program
• Land-Based placement at the Opaskwayak Cree Nation, Manitoba
• A Life-long learning process, both academically and personally
Resources