

# BOARDS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

## STORIES FROM YOUR COMMUNITIES

## ABORIGINAL PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING AT SOOKE ELEMENTARY

Contributor:

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When offered the opportunity to host a Grade 5 classroom based on the Aboriginal Principles of Learning at Sooke Elementary, I immediately accepted. The idea of sharing knowledge with Elders, our community and the T'Sou-ke Nation was too good an opportunity to pass up. This program began as the vision of our Aboriginal Education Department with Kathleen King Hunt and Maryls Denny. A seed was planted! Many months of planning and hard work by the Aboriginal team and I went by and our program moved from planning and connecting to community groups to staffing and talking to parents. The seed had begun to grow.



Our new Principles of Learning (POL) class began to take shape with the addition of two talented teachers, Lisa Stuart and Erin Wood.

"All of this happened [planning] before I had the honour of being selected as the Grade 5 Principles of Learning classroom teacher and I am so thankful to our team members for doing all the heavy lifting to get us where we are today," said Lisa. "Our first couple of months have been a whirlwind with getting to know our students, setting up routines, and deciding how we wanted to get started. We have a diverse group of 28 students that range in learning style, needs and abilities. I can say with confidence that the majority of our students were hooked on outdoor education and exploration of the Principles of Learning from our first few discussions and planning sessions. Their questions were thoughtful and their ideas on how to make use of our surroundings and communities to learn across the curriculum inspired us.





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“We are very fortunate to have the ocean and forests at our doorstep. We also have access to a 250-acre Scouts Canada camp and all of its facilities – cabins, green spaces, archery range, canoes, creeks, trails, kitchens, and more. An incredible scout leader, Denyse Koo, has agreed to work with our program once a month at the camp to teach our kids a variety of outdoor awareness and recreation activities. We are always pleased and honoured to have members of the T’Sou-ke Nation accompany us whenever possible and to spend time at T’Sou-ke Nation to learn about their economic and environmental initiatives, to build ties and to share knowledge.

“As I mentioned, it’s only been a couple of months and we have already been on five out trips and had three in-school visitors to talk about outdoor awareness and to begin our local plant study



(thanks to Ab. Ed. role model Della Sylvester). I can truly see the difference in our students already. Their questions are richer, their eyes are open and observing where ever we go and they are sharing their knowledge with friends and family on a regular basis. They are fully engaged in the experiences and the wealth of information that they are retaining continues to surprise us. They know that they will have opportunities to teach others in the school and community, so they are diligent about recording their learning in their field guides and can't wait to start planning “lessons.” The level of discussion and output is evidence to me that these kids are reaping the benefits of this fantastic outdoor, experiential learning program. I can't wait to work with the students, my teaching partner, and the rest of the team to plan our upcoming adventures. The place-based learning opportunities are plentiful.”

This is a legacy classroom with multiple experiences and opportunities for students take subject-specific concepts and content, and transform them into a new understanding. These opportunities relate to students' identity in the world, both as individuals and as members of their community and society and allow the students to impart and exchange information, experiences and ideas, and to explore the world around them. What a concept!

