

# BOARDS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

## STORIES FROM YOUR COMMUNITIES

## BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN CANADA

Contributor:

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On Friday, September 23, 2016, the Carson Graham staff participated in the [Blanket Exercise](#) as part of our school-based professional development day workshops.

Led by facilitator Davita Marsden, Administration, teaching and support staff participated in a role-playing activity that challenged participants to examine their own bias and understanding of the history of Canada and the effects that colonialism, *The Indian Act* and residential schooling has had, and continues to have on Indigenous communities today.

In addition, we were honored to have Alroy "Bucky" Baker and Tracy Williams from the Squamish Education department and Heathery Mhyre from the Aboriginal Education team join us.

This activity was extremely powerful and impacted each person individually and collectively as a school community. Growth in individual understanding of the process of colonization and how it impacts the entire community and our students was clearly evident.

One of our teachers said the following about the experience:

*"The blanket exercise workshop gave me a new perspective and understanding of the atrocities against First Nations people in Canada. It was emotionally charged and provided an amazing opportunity not only to feel a sense of*



*connection to the past, but also this experience gave our school community a chance to connect to each other on a deeper level and develop a sense of belonging that we will then be able to pass down to our students!"*

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Our school principal, Karim Hachlaf, said this:

*"The Blanket Exercise was far more than a typical staff development exercise, as it moved us along our journey to improve our Aboriginal understanding and teaching practices. Within my seventeen years as an educator, this experience was one of the most profound. The entire Carson Graham staff displayed emotional vulnerability and trust with one another and truly solidified a powerful bond that will propel us forward. We will seize this opportunity to 'go forward with courage.'"*

And here is how a school education assistant described the Blanket Exercise:

*"The emotional wounds that this workshop opened up in me were profound. As a child growing up in an area with a 'reserve' I am forever embarrassed that as a 'white person' this was allowed to happen to my peers and even more sorrowful that this type of abuse has caused the devastating damage to [their] family structure even to this day."*

Carson Graham has been working on the pathway towards reconciliation and greater understanding of Aboriginal and local place-based history over the past three years. This journey has included presentations by Wab Kinew, Brad Baker, and the Aboriginal Education Team.

This Pro D session has brought the staff together in ways that no other Pro D has and from here, Carson Graham continues to move forward with courage on our individual and collective journeys towards reconciliation for all learners.

*BCSTA thanks Deneka Michaud, Manager, Communications at SD44 (North Vancouver).*

