



AIRS Collaborative Inquiry Report 2020-2021

AIRS Collaborative Inquiry Final Report 2020/21

Unless otherwise stated, individual school reflections are written by artists in residence. Overview and exhibition written by Maggie Milne Martens. Teacher observations are based on post residency interviews conducted by Maggie Milne Martens and Christine Giesbrecht and written by Christine Giesbrecht.

Photo credits go to artists and teachers from each respective school unless otherwise indicated.

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Participating Schools:

Admiral Seymour Elementary
Britannia Elementary
Florence Nightingale Elementary
Graham D. Bruce Elementary
John Henderson Elementary
Lord Beaconsfield Elementary
Maquinna Elementary
Mount Pleasant Elementary
Queen Alexandra F.A.M.I.L.Y School
Sir James Douglas Elementary
Sir John Begbie Elementary
Sir Pierre Elliott Trudeau Elementary
Sir Walter Moberly Elementary
Southlands Elementary
Tecumseh Elementary
Thunderbird šx^wəx^waʔəs Elementary



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In Gratitude





AIRS: Artist in Residence Studio Program

AIRS is a partnership program with the Vancouver School Board that seeks to provide equitable access to authentic, high quality, and socially relevant artmaking for elementary students. AIRS reclaims space within elementary schools to create a dedicated working studio and enables a local professional artist-in-residence to work with students and teachers weekly across the school over the course of the year. This year, the AIRS program supported twelve residencies within established studios. Through grants, we were also able to continue and expand two pilot residencies and grow to include two media arts residencies encompassing between 8 to 16 weeks each with an artist-in-residence. The Art and Discovery studio at Nightingale continued its mentorship program to enable two emerging artists to share their knowledge and gain experience working alongside teachers in schools.

The Collaborative Inquiry

The Collaborative Inquiry process is an ideal framework for assessing and understanding the impact and value of artmaking for students within a dedicated studio space and with an artist-in-residence. The development of core competencies within the BC curriculum and indirect benefits extended to curricular learning within the classroom are explored by teachers. The inquiry process is critical for gathering evidence of the value of the visual arts for the education of the whole child and provides rationale for its protection and funding within public schools for the benefit of future generations.

Feedback gained through the collaborative inquiry process enables us to determine best practices for collaboration between artists and teachers in schools that maintain successful, flexible and innovative residencies and strengthen equity and excellence in student learning.



Our Process for 2020-2021

Our inquiry was facilitated for the second year by Christine Giesbrecht, district mentor support teacher and veteran art teacher. The inquiry process is structured to enable lead teachers from each participating school to meet four times over the year for professional development and to share their observations on the impact of artmaking within the studio for student learning. This year our meetings took place online due to Covid with presentations by Dr. Sylvia Kind in November and Aaron-Nelson Moody (Splash) in February. Dr. Kind is an artist, scholar and 'atelierista' at Capilano University in the Department of Early Childhood Education and Pedagogy. She presented some of her current work and research in cultivating the studio as an ever-evolving space of thinking and co-creation. Sylvia is interested in the spaces where children's ideas collide and intersect, activating new avenues of thinking and discovering. Splash, whose Squamish name means "Splashing Eagle", is a Coast Salish carver and teacher who has shared his work, practice and cultural knowledge with students in schools across Vancouver for more than a decade.

Although our inquiry was entirely online this year, data was still gathered and documented by teachers over the course of the residencies through photos, shared observation, teacher and student written reflections and post residency on-line debrief interviews.



Collaborative Inquiry Speakers:

Aaron-Nelson Moody (Splash): Splashing Eagle

Photo credit:

<http://splashingeagle.ca/>

Dr. Sylvia Kind: Encounter with Materials

Photo credit:

<http://encounterswithmaterials.com/>

Given the context of the global Covid 19 pandemic, we asked:

How do the visual arts create ways to foster community and connection when we are physically distanced?

- How do the arts make visible the ways in which we are connected as a community?
- How does the use of technology create opportunities and challenges for community and connection?

We also continued to explore the following inquiry questions:

- How does sustained collaboration with an artist in a virtual or real studio space impact student learning in relation to core competencies and the First Peoples' Principles of Learning?
- In what ways might the art making process support social emotional intelligence and mental wellbeing?



The Exhibition: (Re)Imagining Together: Creative Connection during COVID

This school year has been like no other. Even though schools remained open during the pandemic, strict health and safety protocols confined students to cohort groupings with limitations on social interaction, shared space and materials. While on the surface, there was a semblance of normalcy, the long vigilance of separation has exacted a psychological toll on students and teachers alike.

What can art do during this unprecedented time of anxiety, social fragmentation and restricted freedom to reach across the spaces that divide us to make our sense of community visible and tangible?

(Re)Imagining Together highlights the artmaking vision and creative processes happening in 16 VSB elementary schools this year through the Artist in Residence Studio program (AIRS). At each school, a local professional artist worked with teachers to design and facilitate unique artmaking projects that attend to our collective loss and longing for connection amid the pandemic. What are the ways in which we are still connected even though we are physically apart? How might this belonging be envisioned and felt through a shared creative process?

In this exhibition, community is expressed in a multiplicity of conceptions; family stories woven, stitched and knitted together as a tapestry installation; detailed drawings of home interiors linking students through an interactive website; paper quilts exploring the resilience and complexity of cultural identities; land-based art practices that cultivate and celebrate our inter-connection with the earth, and large-scale, collaborative murals that foreground community values. Whether through painting, sculpting, sound mapping, weaving, dance, ceremony, environmental or media arts, artists provided students a safe context to express their individual creativity and witness these artworks brought together into a greater collaboration.



The Exhibition: (Re)Imagining Together: Creative Connection during COVID continued

Each project in this exhibition is represented through photo documentation, written description, some artifacts or fragments of process, and a QR code that will immerse you in the artmaking process at each respective school. This window into the artmaking experience showcases the thinking, making and coming into being of a work, rather than its final product. It is in the reciprocity of making and sharing through art that community is experienced and visibly present. The QR codes call attention to the physical separation between the gallery and each school context as well as our increased dependence on virtual forms for connection during pandemic.

In previous years, the AIRS program has operated out of a dedicated, shared studio space within the school. This year, the closure of shared spaces required artists to recreate the studio through remote teaching on Teams or outdoor arrangements.



Whilst remote teaching was fraught with technological and communication challenges, it also provided opportunities for meaningful connection for students whose risk factors required them to learn at home. Through Teams, at-home learners participated with the rest of their class cohort and interacted with the artist. For some students, this was one of few opportunities to see and interact with their classmates.

(Re)Imaging Together considers the multiplicity of ways community is expressed and experienced through material art practices.

One of the most significant absences during the pandemic has been our touch connection with others, experienced through simple, almost incidental, acts of friendship and play, but profoundly integral to our sense of belonging. In art, touch is embedded into the making process itself; hands, endlessly inventive, curious and intent, transform materials into symbolic form. These tactile expressions in art - drawn, smeared, torn, poured, constructed, carved, woven, assembled, scrunched, molded and knotted together - are embedded with personal significance, transcending the space between us through felt connection.

Key Findings

Voice and Identity

Many teachers pointed out the unique role of the arts in allowing students to have conversations about issues brought to the forefront this year such as Black Lives Matter and the confirmation of the remains of children at Indigenous residential schools across Canada. Visual art enabled students to engage with these events and to process their own identity in relation to the issues. At Britannia, students learned to interpret art and as they recognized that artists have a message to convey, they realized they also have something to say. This allowed students to develop the Communication Core Competency with a particular focus on intent and purpose.

Teachers recognized how art empowered students to uncover who they are in relation to the larger society. The Core Competency Positive Personal and Cultural Identity was at work as students grew in their understanding of cultural context as well as recognizing personal values and choices. As students explored their emerging identity, they solidified their intentions to engage with important issues by making them visible through art. One principal noted that students walk differently when they have a voice through the arts. Some students as art collaborators traced their histories and communicated their views on human rights, social justice, and community building. Even primary students connected the safety and growth symbolized by cocoons with the lack of safety Indigenous students experienced at residential schools.



Key Findings continued

Community Connection during Covid

Teachers identified that AIRS was unique in continuing during Covid and although it was an enormous effort given the need to resort to online or outdoor sessions, observations from teachers demonstrated how the visual arts created ways to foster community and connection when we were physically distanced. Teachers and principals commented that this was the “only thing we had this year”, “in a year with no field trips, AIRS was something upbeat to look forward to”, “it has been the year of having to say ‘no.’ This was the one yes.” and this was the “one thing we were able to do.” Working with an artist was also particularly significant for students during the pandemic since they were interacting with few adults besides their family and their teacher. Connecting and engaging with others and working collectively were facets of the Communication Core Competency that were continually reinforced this year.

Beyond using art to explore the concept of community and connection, the artworks exhibited in the hallways were often the only evidence of other humans in the school. Recess and lunch breaks were carefully staggered to ensure that students had contact with no one outside of their cohort. At Queen Alexandra, twins and friends searched for each other’s panels in the mural. At Nightingale, delicate cocoons and wings hung at eye level lined the hallway, and at Begbie, life-sized, collage-on-paper children lined the walls of the cafeteria. Students searched for their friends’ collages when waiting to wash their hands multiple times each day. A Trudeau teacher commented that AIRS brought outcomes of joy and connection that helped students triumph over hardships brought by the pandemic.



Emergent Themes

Challenges During Covid

Every school spoke of the challenges inherent in working with artists outside of the school bubble during Covid. These included running supplies and buckets to other classes and outdoors when the artist joined remotely or taught outside. Poor weather hampered working outdoors at times. Technology was another hurdle as it could be difficult for the artist to hear the students and get into the flow of a discussion. Lead teachers found it more difficult to explain the program to new teachers at the school since teachers couldn't meet. Staggered recesses and three different start times for lunch made scheduling difficult. Some at-risk students were intimidated to engage in movement activities outdoors. Despite all these hurdles, however, the artists, teachers and students persevered.

Acting as frames of hope, love, trust and resilience, [art] responds to personal and collective longings for connection during a time where the quality of our shared space with one another is significantly reduced and reimaged." Alex Rumirez



Engagement Through the Creative Process

One thing unchanged this year was that teachers noted the engagement of students in their artmaking. "Students were so excited," one Maquinna teacher remembered. There was an "uproar of happiness" when it was AIRS time." One Thunderbird teacher commented that students were engaged and challenging behaviours disappeared during art time. Engagement grew as student choice accompanied their movement through the Creative Thinking Core Competency stages of generating and incubating, creating and innovating, and evaluating and developing.

Greater engagement was noted in older students when the link to their personal identity and self was made intentionally, and this engagement often scaled up according to the freedom they were given in the process of artmaking. A Mount Pleasant student noted that "I liked that we could be so creative and not have to follow all the instructions" and Moberly students articulated their appreciation for having autonomy and choice over what they wanted to film. A theme that emerged from many teachers was the stark contrast between the freedom of expression that AIRS enabled and the endless restrictions and limits on freedom during the pandemic. One teacher noted "There were so many rules during Covid. AIRS was a welcome change."



Working with Artists Online

Artists had the freedom to figure out which combination of remote, in-person-outside or hybrid teaching model worked for them and their school. Four artists joined the classes completely remotely, approximately eight artists taught their residencies outdoors and the remaining artists managed a combination of remote and outdoors. A few schools were fortunate enough to have a large indoor space available and were able to give a few distanced indoor lessons.

There were three unexpected student responses to having an artist teach them remotely. Firstly, some students were initially passive, thinking they were watching a TV show when they watched the artist on screen. It took them a while to understand that they were going to be doing the project themselves. Secondly, some students thought the artists were celebrities since they first met them on a screen. They were thrilled and surprised when saw them in person outdoors! Thirdly, some students found it easier to listen online. The screen held their attention in a way they were used to and knowing it would be difficult to ask questions and receive further instruction online, they listened carefully the first time around.

Working with Artists Outdoors

In past years, the collaborative inquiry explored the impact of working in a dedicated studio space. This year, the ease of working together outdoors as opposed to online became a welcome alternative for many artists and in this way, the benefits of learning outdoors were inadvertently highlighted. Several teachers and students noted that using tech outside was new. One student said, “I pushed myself further going outside for tech.” A Maquinna teacher whose class worked undercover outdoors during the first week of January noted that it was “fantastic” and she loved having it outside. Maquinna artist Heather Lamoureaux reported embracing the cold and windy weather to “create art and dance in alignment with the seasons and elements”, an attitude which trickled down to the teachers and students. Being outdoors inspired walks of hope with Intermediate students at Seymour, and Beaconsfield classes engaged in scavenger hunts looking for architectural features on houses in the neighborhood. The scavenger hunt walks combined observational skills with math, outdoor learning and movement.

Mt. Pleasant teachers also pointed out that working outside was incredibly positive and that student engagement rose. Begbie teachers recalled that making art outdoors was an impactful experience for the students. One student said “this is the best day ever” when they made art outside on a spring blossom walk. Trudeau and Moberly students loved getting outside and building relationships with the natural environment through place-based art installations. The lack of human connection during the pandemic encouraged students to connect with the natural world and teachers noticed that students embraced the opportunity build relationships with place. Artist Rebecca Heyl noted that “students began to find relationships between human and non-human, plants and animals, living and nonliving things such as water, wind, and rocks”



Learning Over Time

The idea that students become increasingly comfortable over time with the risk-taking that art requires continued to emerge from teacher observations. The original Story and Discovery Studio at Nightingale is seven years old this year and teachers note that students are dramatically more open to risk-taking and approach process-based projects with less hesitation over time. Next year, the first cohort of students to have had access to the studio in Kindergarten through to Grade 7 will graduate. Students who didn't know how to use masking tape in the early years of the studio are now confident artists who communicate visually.

The ongoing culture of art displayed in the school allowed fragile installations to be hung within arms' reach in the Nightingale hallways and no students disturbed them. Seymour noted that at-risk students who were particularly risk-adverse became noticeably more comfortable after years working with the same artist because trust had already been developed.

In as early as the second year of AIRS, a transition was noticed. A Henderson teacher noted that "the appetite for process-focused art continues to build in teachers and students over year two. Students who don't typically see themselves as 'artistic' engaged in the process." The same thing was seen at Douglas in its second year where students and teachers knew what to expect and were better able to trust unexpected processes to the artist. Teachers recognized that not knowing where the class was headed could feel like "stepping into the abyss" and that trust in the artist was required in order to commit to the process. The balance between the desire to know where one is headed and allowing the emergent process to unfold was commented on in several schools.

What is Art?

Expanding students' definitions of what art can be continued to be a theme that emerged from teacher observations. A Henderson teacher noted that the focus on process resonated as students learned to use sound as their artistic medium and the artist allowed space for risk-taking.

The use of outdoor spaces created opportunities for place-based, ephemeral installations that expanded students' understanding of what art can be. Exploring community during Covid resulted in murals and group installations across many studios which reinforced for students the power of collaborative art-making practices as opposed to the perpetuation of the myth of the lone genius artist. Moberly teachers noted that working in the dirt in the garden was in stark contrast to the clean sterility mandated by the pandemic. It was also transformative to experience the earth as a medium. Teachers acknowledged that working with artists expanded the scope of what art education might look like within the school. One teacher observed that "the residency was so outside of the box in terms of what schools generally offer for art instruction. I never would have imagined what she (the artist) brought in."

While teachers often reflected on the open-ended nature of the art-making process, Tecumseh teachers reflected on the push and pull of choice and constraint as being key to the creative process. Students had an open-ended brainstorm regarding concepts to make their quilt about. The artist then provided structure through the patterns of the quilt squares which pulled in students who might be nervous to engage in wide-open-ended art activities. Within the pattern, however, there was the choice of colour, pattern and top-stitched image. Student collaboration also occurred as students helped each other through the process of sewing, again reinforcing the idea of art as a community endeavor.



Intersections: Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Art

Aaron-Nelson Moody, also known as ‘Splash’ from his Squamish name that means Splashing Eagle, is a Coast Salish carver and teacher who spoke at our Collaborative Inquiry session on February 8th. Splash has shared his work, practice and cultural knowledge with students in schools across Vancouver for more than a decade. Currently, in addition to his personal art practice, he is designing and teaching a reconciliation carving program at Langara University College. Splash brings a wealth of experience and understanding of the role of art in community relationships, revitalization, and the work of reconciliation. In preparation for our session, we watched “Now is the Time”, a National Film Board film on Robert Davidson by Christopher Auchter (2019) to provide context.

Splash spoke about the intersections between Indigenous art, community and storytelling. He spoke about art being so integrated into his culture’s lifestyle that there is no word for it as a separate entity. Splash explained the importance of being in a good frame of mind when carving the totem pole in order to positively affect those who touch the carving in the future. When sharing stories in community, whoever is there that day is invited to share a story and diversity amongst the witnesses is positive. He wove this invitation to share our personal stories into his drawing exercise, modeling how story and art weave seamlessly together. He encouraged us as teachers to use art as a storytelling tool. He reminded us that every human has a beautiful song inside them that we unlock through being inherently generous and inclusive.

Photo credit: <http://splashingeagle.ca>

Studio Reports and Teacher Inquiry Observations



The Art of Transformation

Trees have different names, forms and silhouettes. Tree buds also have their own distinct form and texture.

Can you name a tree by the shape, texture and pattern of its buds?



Tree buds opening is a transformation that happens all around us, silently, slowly, in plain sight. This gift of life, beauty and wonder is one we can all experience if we take the time to notice.

LOOK! The trees are awakening.



Tree buds awaken with light and colour. Students created art using light and colour to explore this process of transformation.



Nightingale Elementary

Artists: Maggie Milne Martin, Kellen Jackson and Nura Ali

Lead Teachers: Colleen Mieczanec and April Huang

Principal: Parin Morgan

Transformations often happen in spaces of solitude, darkness; in the in-between spaces of our lives, unseen: spaces that may or may not be of our choosing. It is in these spaces that the materials of life and art are re-examined, re-imagined, transformed into something entirely new. Transformation takes time and patience; it is a process of becoming.

This year at Nightingale, primary students have been inspired by the spaces of transformation we find in nature: cocoons, buds awakening, and wings in flight. Working with found materials, story and movement, students entered into the experience of transformation through hands-on and embodied processes. Grade 1 classes created sculptural assemblages and drawings that transformed the space of their hallway into a cocoon forest; kindergarten students documented the process of buds awakening through light and colour explorations culminating in a collaborative transformation dance with shadow and video projection; Grade 2s and 3s constructed transformation wings for a murmuration installation that held space for the hope of 'becoming' in the space between the now and the not yet. Artmaking itself is a practice of transformation that can enrich both experience and understanding of the self and one another through individual and collective imagination.

We learn that even in our socially fractured spaces of separation during this COVID pandemic, art can make visible the beauty of our belonging together in community, expressed in and through shared creation.





Nightingale Teacher Observations:

The impact of the residency was seen in the students' ability to remember the big ideas they learned through the embodied practice of art making. For example, April, Grade one/two teacher, noted the SEL connection as students physically nestled into their own confined, but cozy and safe, cocoons under their desks as they drew and reflected on being there. Teachers noted that students had this experience in October and they were still talking about it in June. The Grade 1/2 students later discussed the tragedy of finding the remains of 215 children's bodies at Kamloops Residential School and a student referred back to the experience of the safety of the cocoon and said, "They weren't safe. Why do we have a safe place?" Having discussed the big idea of safety and growth "provided a natural and meaningful way to engage" in heavy topics even with young children. Another example of how the experiences in the studio stayed with the students was when they saw a gigantic branch on a walk, immediately connected it to their experience in the studio and decided that they should bring it back to Ms. Maggie. The students worked together to wrestle this unwieldy branch into the school.

Colleen, K teacher, noticed that the dramatic installations in the hallway provided a sense of community during this year when we were mostly kept apart and there were so many things we could not do. The students demonstrated responsibility in not touching the fragile cocoons and wings hung at an easily accessible height. The presence of the Art and Discovery Studio and seeing art hung around the school is something the students have come to expect as this is the 7th year of the studio at Nightingale. Teachers noted the development possible when students have been drawing and engaging in open-ended, process-based engagement over many years. Students who are used to creating within an open structure have less hesitation when tackling a new idea. In one of the early years of the studio, intermediate students made flying machines, and many did not know how to tear masking tape. The intermediates today are more comfortable making with their hands and expressing themselves visually.

Principal Parin was “awed by what was created.” She noted that students began to discover their authentic selves through working with others around issues that matter such as Black Lives Matter (BLM), LGBTQ, Climate Change, and Islamophobia. Mentee artist-in-residence, Nura, empowered students to uncover who they are in relation to a larger society. Creating transformation masks gave students a concrete way to explore their emerging engagement with and commitment to these critical issues. One student spoke of choosing to make their artwork around BLM “because I hate it when people of colour are being mistreated.” The private journey of Grade 6/7 students was made public through art which allowed them to peel off the mask, discover, and present their authentic selves. Creating a visual manifestation “amplifies their intentions.” Parin noticed that students walk differently when they have a voice through the arts.



AIRS Director and Nightingale
Artist: Maggie Milne-Martens



Seymour Elementary

Artists: Heather Lamoureux and Susan Hall
Lead Teacher: Natasha Burditt
Principal: Bryce Recsky

“Once I started doing arts, I thought, ‘this is the best and I will never stop doing it!’”

-Grade 2 student

Offering Gifts

At Seymour Elementary we spent 7 weeks working towards a Winter Solstice Ceremony with Grades 2-4. I was fortunate to be able to work in an outdoor space with them so we embraced the cold and windy weather and created art in alignment with the seasons. They all listened to a story about Winter Solstice from my friend Michelle Pierre, an Nlaka’pamux elder. We considered what we were grateful for, celebrated the fall harvests, thought about the value of rest, and planted seeds to grow in the coming year. We worked with natural materials to create medicine jars and wreaths. We considered the dark and light of life through self portraits and we danced in alignment with the elements. All of this came together at a Winter Solstice Celebration that the whole school could visit during lunch.



Seymour Teacher Observations:

Teachers were thankful that AIRS continued during the pandemic as this was the “one thing we were able to do.” They noted that at-risk students who were risk averse and worked with the same artist over several years became increasingly trusting. They noticed that the program also works better later in year once students are settled in. Movement can be healing but is also a hurdle for students who may lack the confidence to take risks as there is a real fear of failure. Interestingly, the only downside noted for working outdoors was that experimenting with movement outside “in public” was particularly difficult for students who weren’t comfortable with taking that risk to move outside

One student walked through and said, “Wow this really feels like a celebration.” Another student remarked, “I am proud to be Metis.”



Seymour and Maquinna Intermediate

Artist: Susan Hall

Human Migration

Each year, thousands of people leave their home and move to a new city or country. Migration occurs for many reasons whether social, political, economic or environmental. There is often both a “push” to move to a place where living conditions are more favourable and a “pull” to remain close to family, community and culture. In our schools, many students and their families know first hand the experience of displacement, migration, exile and relocation.

Divisions 1, 2, 3 explored the theme of Human Movement and Migration. Students will be encouraged to create a story around a universal wire sculpture of no particular identity. Through imagining the transition between old land and new, the past and the future, we will attempt to visually represent the space where hopes and dreams exist. Through movement studies, painting on wood, wire sculpture, photography and writing, each student will experience how art helps us to understand and gain empathy for the diverse lived experiences of those who have come to a new home. An exhibit including both art and movement elements will guide classes from both schools to follow footsteps of hope through the school ground and inspire a walk through the streets near the school. We hope the dialogue that follows will help us locate feelings of hope here in our own community!



Britannia Elementary

Artist: Tami Murray

Lead Teachers: Elizabeth Costa and Pascal Spino

Principal: Jason Webber

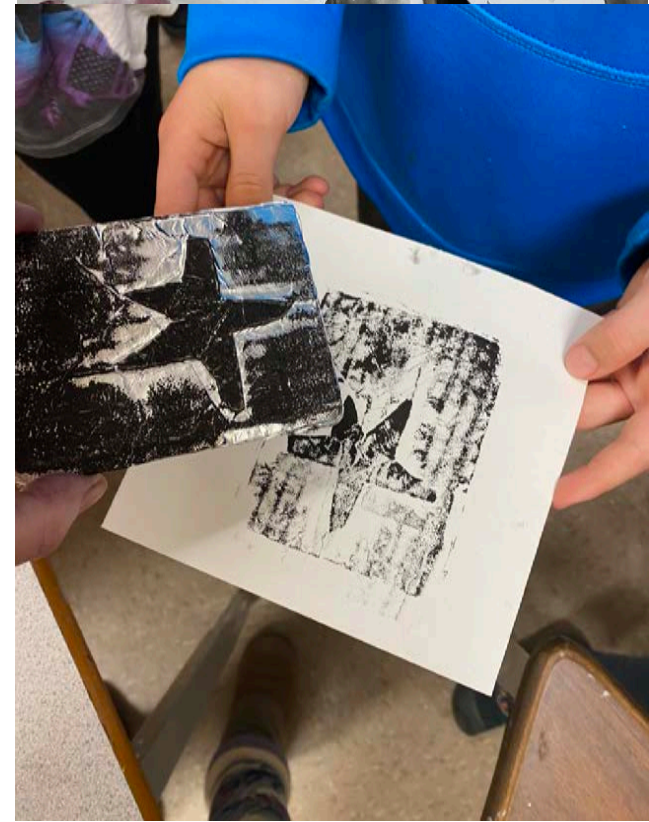
The theme for the 2020/21 AIRS residency at Britannia Community Elementary is Sharing our Voices. Through the project, each student artist is invited to share their unique perspective in the form of a relief printmaking plate that tells a story, explains who they are or shares a wish that is then installed in the shared spaces within the school. Taking our inspiration from street artists like Banksy and Invader, some installations are easily seen; while others hide and take a little more effort to find, turning the project into an exercise in simultaneous inclusion and exclusivity within the school community.

An unforeseen, but welcome, aspect of the project is the temporariness of the installation. Street art in public spaces is by nature temporary in most cases. Left to the elements, artists are aware of the possibility of the work being destroyed, altered or removed. The installations within the school are also open to being tampered with or erased without notice, often within a week of installation due to deep cleaning practices on high touch surface areas in keeping with public health and safety measures. Each installed stamp becomes a message hidden or out in the open which everyone in the school community is welcome to search for and bring their own unique perspectives and experiences to the interpretation of the art installed. Outsiders can experience the installation in its current iteration, but won't know where to look for every aspect of the project or have a memory of the parts that have been removed from the environment.

Adding a more permanent aspect to the project, the public installation was supported by each division's creation of a multi-plate print that included each participant's stamp on tissue paper. Each cohort then added a mark to a banner sized paper to create the look and feel of a wall of graffiti. The final piece has the multi-plate prints collaged overtop of the graffiti banner.

“I liked it because we got to draw our feelings.

“I have just fully explored all the ways that I could make marks on the plate's surface. I am sharing a magical place.”
-Grade 1 Student



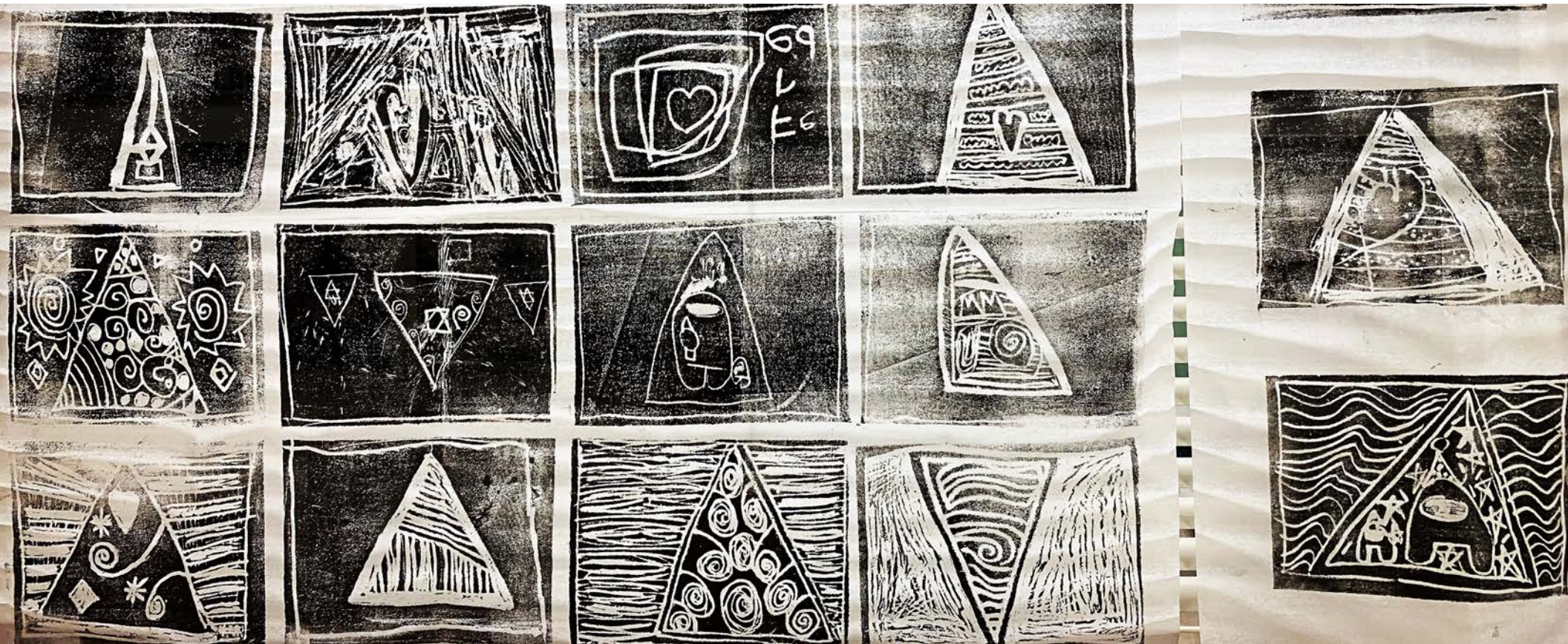
Britannia Teacher Observations:

One teacher noticed parallels between making art and learning in other subjects. For example, she pointed out how writing is an art where authors experiment with words as their medium. Students understood the connection to selecting descriptive words or not being held to a strict format when writing. Students reflected that art is also present in math where numbers can be both the language and the material that you play with “in the same way as you play with Lego”. Beyond experimentation, further parallels noticed by teachers between art and other school subjects were the way in which we learn from and embrace mistakes. Making “mistakes” in art, as in other subjects, leads to greater learning or a new direction.

Teachers noticed that students connected with the desire to send a message. Through learning to interpret art, students recognized that the artist was often conveying a message. They saw art as a valid career and recognized that they also have a point of view to convey.

Learning from the artist remotely required students to improve their observational skills and pay close attention to the lesson. The desks had to be in rows which would not be typical and resulted in less socializing. This had its pros and cons but seemed to allow some to be less distracted. Even 60 Kindergarten students listened carefully to the video lesson and then Tami had a unique set up where she would work with rotating groups of 3-4 students at a distance in the studio while the other students worked on another project in the classroom.

“The students developed their ability to critique themselves and others...and learn from others”
-Britannia teacher



Beaconsfield Elementary

Artist: Kirsten Hatfield

Lead Teacher: Shauna Bredin

Principal: Lani Morden

For this year's AIRS program we came up against many challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I was unable to physically be at the school, and while planning our classes we were unsure if all the students would be at the school as well. I wanted to create a program that would be accessible for students working both at home and at the school that would require very few supplies.

We have all been isolated at home so much throughout this last year so I thought our homes would be a great subject for this year's project. Each home represents more than a building, it represents a family who lives there, and each family is an important part of our community. Asking the students to draw their homes was an opportunity to reflect on this past year of isolation, as well as a tool for sharing and learning about their fellow classmates.

Each week I taught with a mixture of worksheets, pre-recorded videos and live webcam sessions. It was wonderful being able to include the few students who were isolated at home with their in-school classmates through these online sessions.

We started the program off by looking and observing through some fun ice breaker drawing exercises as well as an "architectural element scavenger hunt." I taught the students some basic perspective techniques as well as techniques for how to represent light and shadow. It was fun integrating math and science into art class. The bulk of the program was spent creating two drawings, one of the exterior of our homes and one of an interior space within our homes, using the new observational skills and drawing techniques we had been developing. I asked the students to think about ways to show their personality through their drawings and include memories and objects while taking artistic license to make their drawings unique and personal.



“Each home represents more than a building. It represents a family who lives there, and each family is an important part of our community.”

Each class we took time to look at each other's work and discuss and exchange ideas. At first some of the students were shy, but each week I noticed them becoming more comfortable and open to sharing their work, as well as to experimenting and exploring new ideas and techniques within their drawings.

At the completion of the project I build a website displaying all the students' exterior home drawings on one page; almost like a map or a neighbourhood. Each house is clickable to lead to that student's interior home drawing. My intention is for the students to spend time both at school and at home with their families exploring the website and making connections with their classmates to help foster a feeling of community and belonging.

Beaconsfield Teacher Observations:

Teachers marveled at how Kirsten's engaging personality came across so strongly online. Her positivity was catching. She worked completely remotely and teachers found that moving the iPad around the class so that individual students had a chance to interact with Kirsten worked well. They recognized that trust for both teachers and students was a large factor. Not knowing how the online interaction would work nor exactly what was coming could feel like stepping into the abyss, but students did remarkably well and teachers handled the uncertainty that the technology presented.

Teachers appreciated Kirsten's positivity. She validated the students' feelings and modeled an accepting inner dialogue. Problems were solved through acknowledging frustrations and working through them. For example, Kirsten would say "yeah, I have a hard time with that too." By validating students' feelings, they were not stuck for long. For example, she would comment on specific lines the students had drawn as opposed to using generalized comments like "nice work". Kirsten appreciated the squiggle that a student didn't like.

The appetite for process-focused art continued to build in teachers and students over year two. Students who don't typically see themselves as "artistic" engaged in the process. Highlights included a scavenger hunt outdoors looking for architectural features on houses in the neighbourhood and these walks combined observational skills with math, outdoor learning and movement.

Kirsten accepted and encouraged wacky architecture and surreal houses as another option which demonstrated an acceptance of everyone's place in world. She eschewed the message that this is good because that's what was asked for. Difference was celebrated through the acceptance of a variety of homes such as condos or garden-level suits. A student's special place might be their own room, a shared room, a bunk, or on the porch. Examining home brought up the question, "where is my home?" for those living with a foster family or living between divorces parents, and all of these variations on home were normalized through the art process. This open-endedness was complemented by concrete skills such as learning how to shade and how to draw in perspective with 3D shapes which connected to geometry and math. Having these concrete skills empowered students to communicate their unique sense of home.

"In a year with no field trips, AIRS was something upbeat to look forward to!"

"There were so many rules during Covid. AIRS was a welcome change."

-Beaconsfield teachers



Chief Maquinna Elementary

Trees, Pollinators and Me

Artist: Heather Lamoureux

Lead Teachers: Toni McKay, Erika Wilson

Principal: Bruce Sallee

With Maquinna Elementary, we focused on our relationship with nature. Our focus was pollinators with the K-2 group. We discovered all the ways our lives intersect with pollinators and how we can be in community with them. We did this by dancing like bees, butterflies and hummingbirds. For our celebration, we created the “tastiest flowers”, made prints of the fruits and vegetables we receive thanks to pollinators, created “magic earth crowns” and made seed balls to grow food for our pollinator friends!

The focus for Grades 2-4 was Trees. We looked at what humans have in common with our tree relatives. We created a poem and trunk drawing that reflected each person’s journey, creating unique, colourful cross-sections. We discussed how trees communicate with one another through their root systems and in turn created our own root systems. We worked collaboratively on imaginations of bark patterns! All our creations were turned into a community forest connecting us to each other and to the generous silent giants around us.

“We need to take care of our trees because they help us breathe.”

-Grade 4 student



Maquinna Teacher Observations:

The teachers described how students loved making art and moving outside. It had a positive effect on well-being and mental health for teachers and students. Being forced to complete the residency outdoors opened up the chance to experience outdoor learning that they would not have experienced otherwise. This connection to the outdoors was seen in how the students became attached to particular trees with which they formed a relationship and personified. Many of the students live in apartments with less immediate access to trees so touching the stable and solid tree was particularly meaningful. Even students in the residency that began in the first week of January created outside under the covered area and students were “so excited to go” despite the cold. Teachers noted that Heather’s creativity combined with her welcoming and warm manner made the students eager to participate in warmups and body movements to “cool music”. Each week built on the last. Teachers were interested in getting the students involved in the conception of the installation piece from the beginning and also in building in reflection time. The students became so interested in the pollinators that their teacher mentioned that she set aside the unit they were going to study and they explored bees instead.

“The residency was so outside of the box in terms of what schools generally offer for art instruction. I never would have imagined what she brought in.”

-Maquinna Teacher

“There was an uproar of happiness when students heard they were going outside for art”

-Maquinna teacher



Mount Pleasant Elementary

Artists: Aaniya Asrani and Annie Canto

Lead Teachers: Linh Liu and Teala Mackowetsky

Principal: Jonathan Weresch

Push & Pull: Between Intimate and Distant

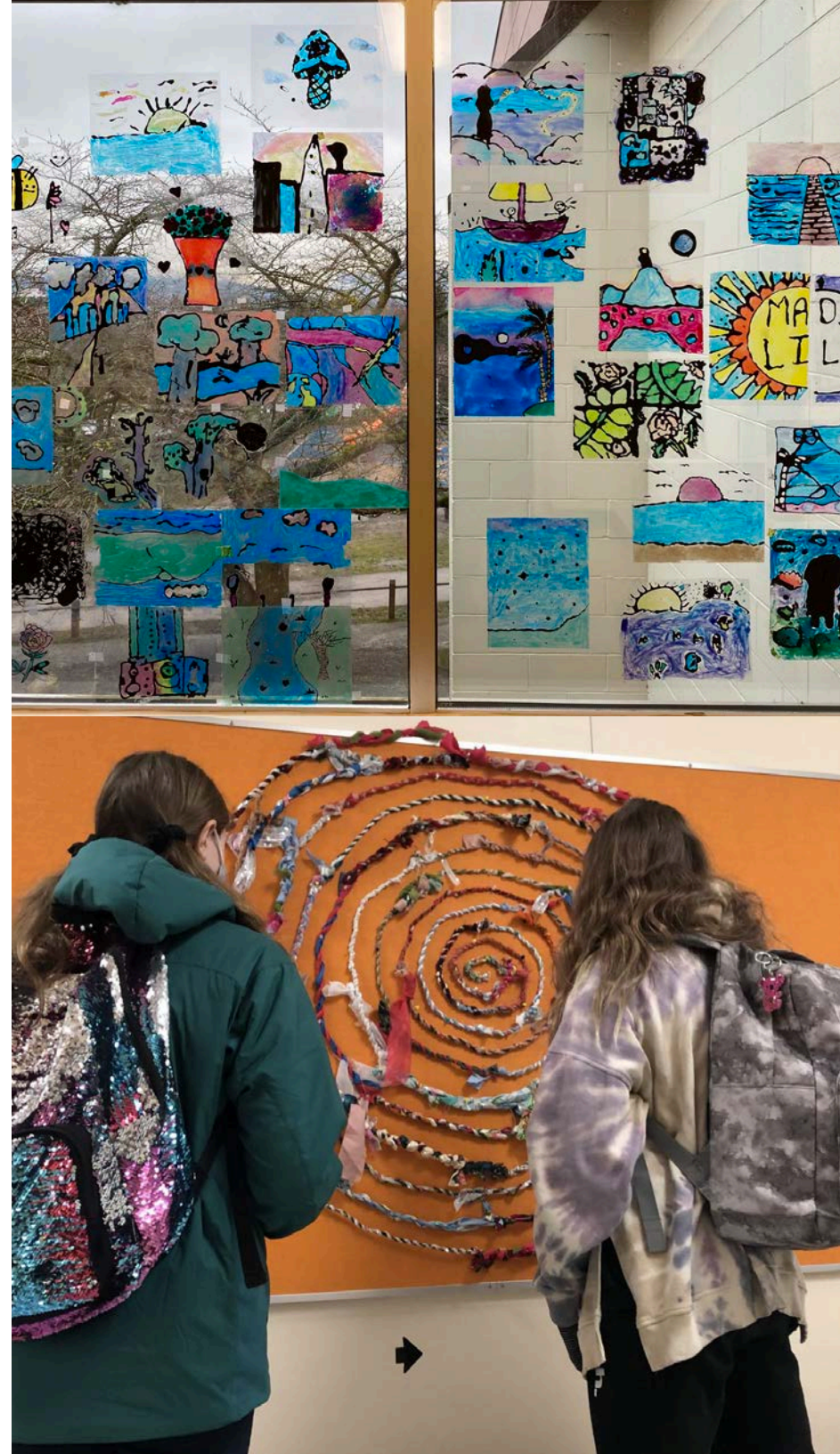
As students learned together in the context of the pandemic, we wanted to understand the physical and emotional spaces that they were inhabiting, together and apart. What object reminded them of home? What did they see outside their window? What stories did they tell? If they could connect two places through a magical pathway, what would they connect? These were some of the prompts that accompanied our material explorations. Each week we delved into a diverse visual language such as textile, sculpture, painting, drawing, paper marbling and stained glass painting to name a few, in order to explore these themes.

And as we re-imagined our sense of community and how we might belong together in a new way, we placed emphasis on the medium of storytelling. Listening and sharing the unique lens with which we each see the world allowed us to feel connected to each other even through a computer screen. We felt viscerally the push and pull between the intimate and the distant. And as we understood this in-between space we were inhabiting, we began to use this point of tension to ask deeper questions.

How could we create moments of connection and joy?

How might we create space for care, generosity and reciprocity?

How might we explore and create a new world, curiously, together?



Mount Pleasant Teacher Observations:

Teachers noted some positive effects when the artist joined the class virtually. Students had to be more responsible for listening to the video and interpreting it on their own because it was more difficult to ask questions after the fact. Some students found it harder to listen to virtual explanation and wanted to get started. It worked for students to pass the laptop around to show their work to the artist. Some students found it easier to listen to the artist large on the screen and seemed to see them as an extension of the teacher because the teacher pressed the link to connect the artist to the class. When students met the artists in person outside after seeing them on the screen, some students thought they were celebrities. Teachers pointed out that working outside was incredibly positive and student engagement rose. Meeting the artists outside was completely different from the hectic stress that sometimes accompanied an online class. On the other hand, there was the challenge of loud construction which occasionally made it hard to hear outside.

Many students named marbling as their favourite media experiment. It was particularly conducive to collaboration and community building. The process required communication and teamwork and students excitedly counted down from 10 to reveal the next marbled work. Peers appreciated each other in a different way through appreciating each other's artwork. They internalized the notion that your art is different from my art, and we can still cheer each other on.

“I liked that we could be so creative and not have to follow all the instructions.”

-Mount Pleasant student



Queen Alexandra Elementary

Artists: Tim Bauer and Cole Pauls

Lead Teachers: Julie Gelson and Karen Tang

Principal: John MacCormack

When first asked to do a mural during this pandemic, we were overwhelmed by trying to find a way to do it safely and abiding by the socially distancing rules, while also allowing for the students to work and come together as a community. This problem became the essence of what this project is all about: how can we come together during the pandemic when we have to be apart?

As our communities are forced to change because of Covid, we wanted to know what community meant to the students, and the ways they thought they could keep their communities together. In many ways, the answer to that question would be answered in doing the mural itself. The whole school had to find a way to accomplish something together in separate groups. Although it was difficult navigating this new terrain, everyone was able to adapt and work together in respect to completing an amazing task.

Spanning 14' wide and 6' tall, the mural consists of each student sharing their version of community in a 6" by 6" tile. Colour-coded to become a rainbow, our Community Mural is a mosaic of housing, education, activities and nature through the perspective of Queen Alexandra's students and faculty. Two silhouetted profiles face each other at the center of the mural, representing the collaborative effort it takes to build a community. This mural became the proving ground and a symbol that this community can adapt and find ways to stay connected as a whole, even when separated.

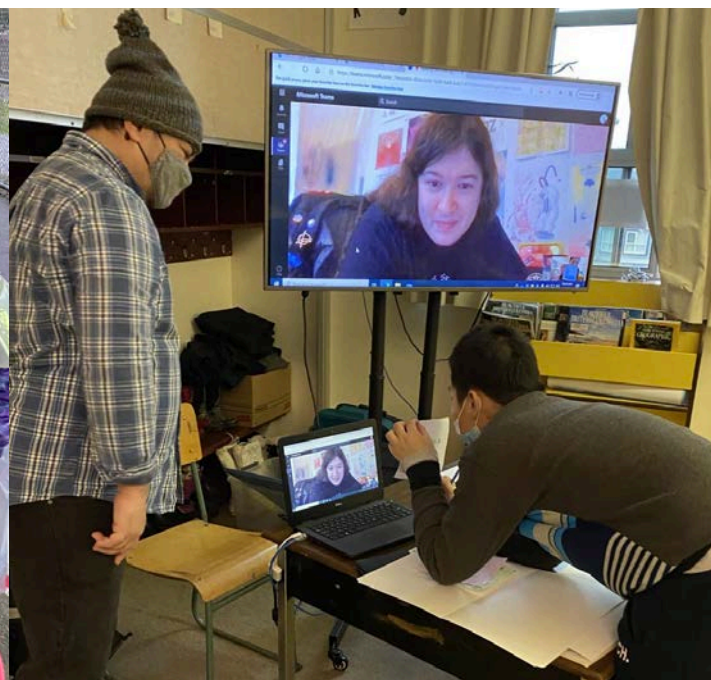




Queen Alexandra Teacher Observations:

Teachers expressed how the mural brought the school together in a year when students and teachers could not connect in the usual way. The closure of the staff room meant teachers were also lonely and isolated. Students enjoyed searching for their friends' panels in the mural as they were not able to connect with friends outside of their cohort in the playground as they usually would. The big idea of community was kept in mind throughout the process as students expressed what community means to them: **eating, kindness, peace, love, play, taking care of the planet, sharing, friendship, staying safe, neighborhood.** These aspects of community continued despite the pandemic, although they often took a different form. The connection between the students' stories and their art was often made. Students enjoyed the process of drawing two ideas first and then narrowing down to one idea to paint on their mural panel.

"This was the only thing we had this year." -Queen Alexandra teacher



Douglas Elementary

Artist: Evaly Carvahlo

Lead Teachers: Alison Wardrop and Pat Treacher

Principal: Daniel Belanger and Brandon Morishita

This year's inquiry has two focuses: celebrating being outdoors by activating a space with art and bridging the gap imposed between us. The result is a collaborative mural project in an already wonderful outdoor space built as an outdoor classroom / amphitheatre.

Our springboard was Ernst Haeckel, the highly influential scientist and artist, and his elegant and mysterious century-old illustrations of natural forms.

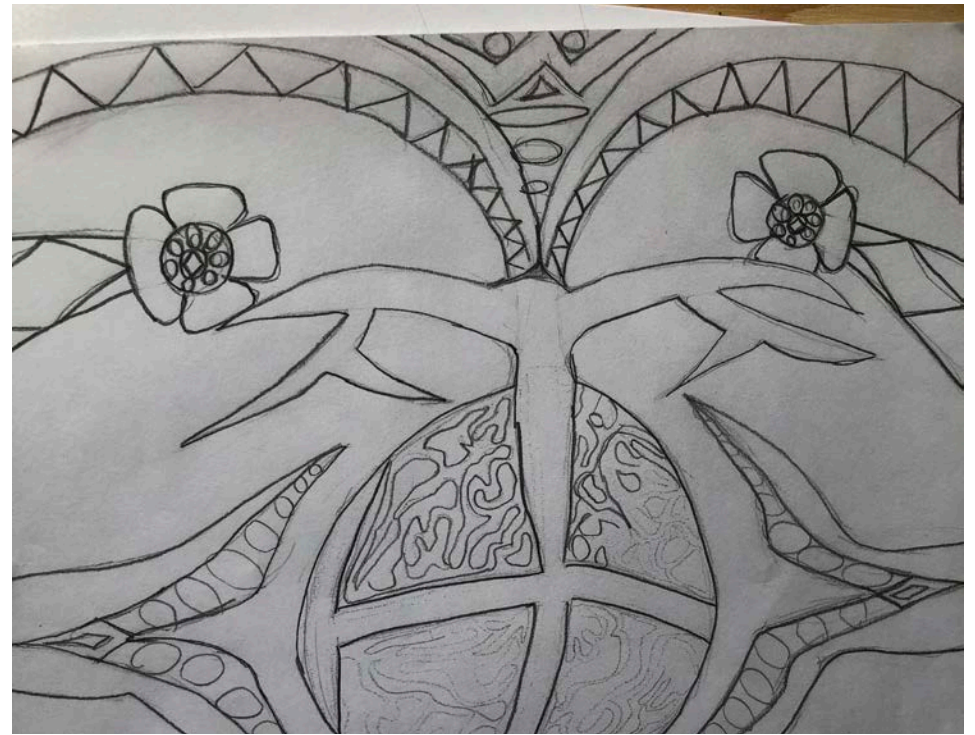
Students connected and shared ideas with students from other cohorts through the creation of collaborative designs. The original drawings were built on from week to week, and were expanded, elaborated, dissected, combined, rearranged and re-imagined into stories. Fundamental design principles were explored with an emphasis on movement, reaching out of the frame and creating connections between elements that build into visual stories.

Despite being apart, there were still ways to think, create and produce something substantial and inspiring. TOGETHER.



Douglas Teacher Observations:

Teachers acknowledged that hosting the AIRS program was “a lot trickier this year for sure.” Covid brought challenges such running supplies and buckets to other classes and outdoors since the artist had to join remotely or work outside. Poor weather also hampered the students’ spirits. Technology was another hurdle, and it was more difficult to explain the program to new teachers at the school since lead teachers couldn’t meet with everyone at once. Staggered recesses and three different start times for lunch made scheduling difficult. Teachers are looking forward to a time when classes will be more connected and can also better experience the continuity in the process when working as a whole school. Despite all of this, teachers and students persevered.



Teachers noted that in this second year of AIRS, students and teachers knew what to expect and were better able to trust artist Evaly when they were asked to experiment with processes such as ripping up early works to make new art. The students were able to move more quickly and trust Evaly for the process.

“Returning students were willing to take more risks.”

-Douglas teacher



Begbie Elementary

Artists: Rebecca Heyl and Jack Kenna

Lead Teachers: Renata Caverzan and Samantha Mok

Principal: John Cortens

Inside Outside and In-Between

Before beginning our studio work this year, we came together to imagine what this year might look like. What would the needs of the students be? How could the arts provide new pathways of thinking through ideas during the pandemic? We came up with a loose concept based on our interests. Jack chose to explore with intermediate students the interior world, the self and the mind. Rebecca chose to continue her nature studio work with primary students concentrating on the natural world. So we thought of this duality between inside and outside, the interior mind-scape and the exterior land-scape as an interesting jumping off point.

We began our programs in parallel and after working with 3 divisions each, we came back together to speak about how our work might intersect and what we discovered was quite interesting. We found that what seemed to fascinate the students the most were the in-between spaces, the what could be spaces, the someday spaces.

Another topic that proved fascinating was the theme of transformation. With Jack's group using collage as the medium, the students were able to explore and find relationships with their classmates. They were also able to re-imagine what their future may hold. With Rebecca's students, as the walls of the new school were going up and the school grounds were transforming, we imagined what the new school could be. We titled the project, "The Future School" and students were given the freedom to imagine and design the kind of school they would like.

The whole world is in the middle of this extended moment. We are no longer at the beginning, nor at the end of the pandemic, but in the midst of it, inhabiting in-between spaces. The arts allow us to pause in this unique moment to take stock and try to understand what this time period holds.

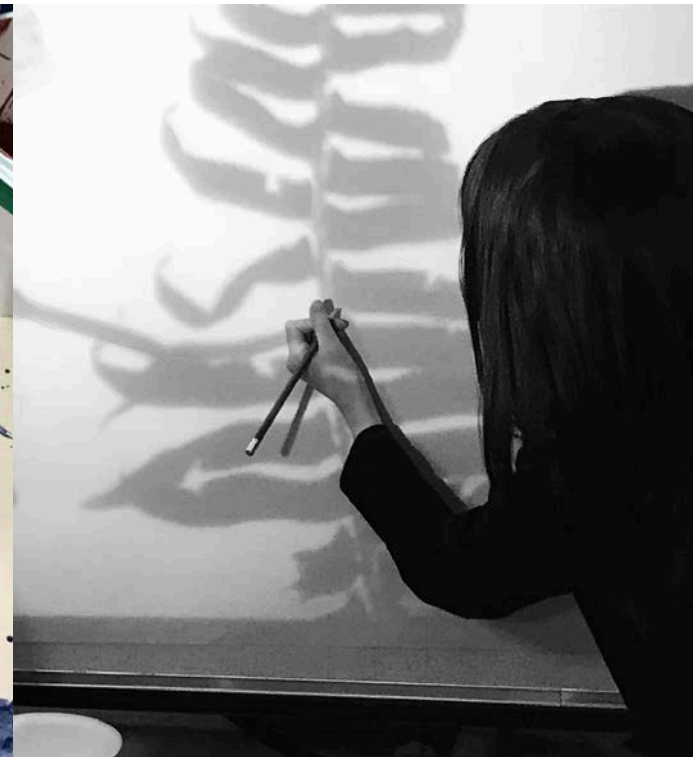
Begbie Teacher Observations

Teachers noted that making art outdoors was an impactful experience for the students. One student said “this is the best day ever” when they walked to Graveley Street to see the blossoms and made art outside. Using watercolour, students captured the beauty of the trees in full bloom and then went back to observe the changes as the blossoms faded. This connected with change as a big idea in the curriculum. Rebecca created a mobile “car studio” in her vehicle, complete with a drying rack in the hood. “Those students who were hesitant to do art were not so hesitant outside!” The students in one class were used to Wilderness Wednesday so they had a stamina for walking that lent itself to exploration. Students experienced a noticeable calmness when they were outdoors and painting. They were engaged, focused and truly enjoyed exploring as shown in their questions and creativity. They were excited to go back to see their trees.

Working with an artist was significant for the school during the pandemic since students were interacting with few adults besides their family and their teacher. Connecting with nature created another way for students to relate to something outside their narrow sphere. Displaying student art in the basement where students lined up to wash their hands strengthened their sense of connection across the school and allowed them to sense the presence of others within the building. As an example of art connecting students, there were twins in different classes who were eager to search for each other’s work in the display. Students did not have the opportunity to connect with other teachers and adults in the way they usually would, so it was enlivening to meet the artists outdoors.

One student asked “Is the ocean alive?”

A classmate replied, “Yes, I think so. It is part of Mother Earth.



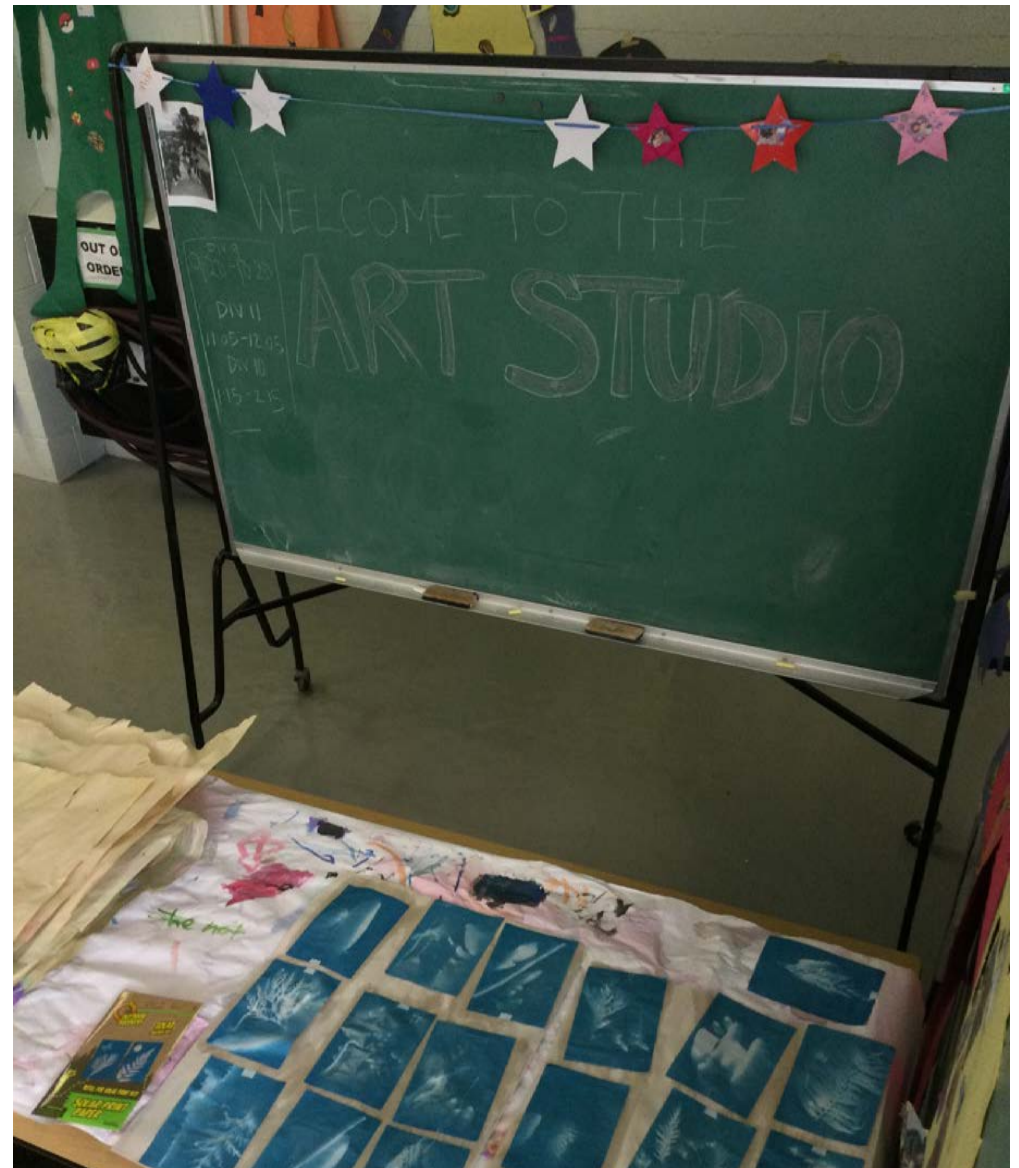


All Our Relations: Interconnectedness:


The theme at the outset of the project was to explore the interconnections of the natural world, and locating ourselves within it. Through the practice of looking closely and creating observational drawings of specimens borrowed from the Beaty Museum of Biodiversity, students began to find relationships between human and non-human, plants and animals, living and nonliving things such as water, wind, rocks, etc.

We considered the spectacular location of Vancouver nestled between the ocean, rivers, and mountains of the Salish Sea which hosts an amazing display of the diversity of life. One fascinating inquiry was into the spaces of connection within the landscape. The Grade 3 students worked with paint on a large collaborative piece to consider where the ocean meets the forest. They focused on how they are in relationship with one another through the animals that travel in between the ocean and the forest, such as salmon.

In addition, students considered how the landscape has been shaped by this interconnection. For instance, the salmon carcasses provide vital nutrients to the trees enabling them to grow monumental in size. In turn, the trees provide nutrients and oxygen-rich freshwater that returns back to the ocean making the Salish Sea a particularly special ecosystem.



Identity Inside Out



With the Grade 4 and 5 students, I wanted to use collage as a way to explore identity and the things happening inside the students' minds. I worked with the students over five weeks to create life-sized collages that represent their passions, interests, and roots. The vision for this project was to share with each other the elements of our identity that are meaningful and to learn about our fellow classmates.

This project culminated in an on-site exhibition of over 70 student-made collages in the lunchroom area, which has been under-utilized this year due to the pandemic. The resulting exhibition brightens up this communal space within the school, where students of every age group line up to wash their hands after recess. School unity was strengthened as each class was able to marvel at the work of the other classes and build connections on a school-wide level.

Trudeau Elementary

Artist: Alejandro Ramirez

Lead Teacher: Alison Diesvelt

Principal: Angela Hughes

Threads of Life

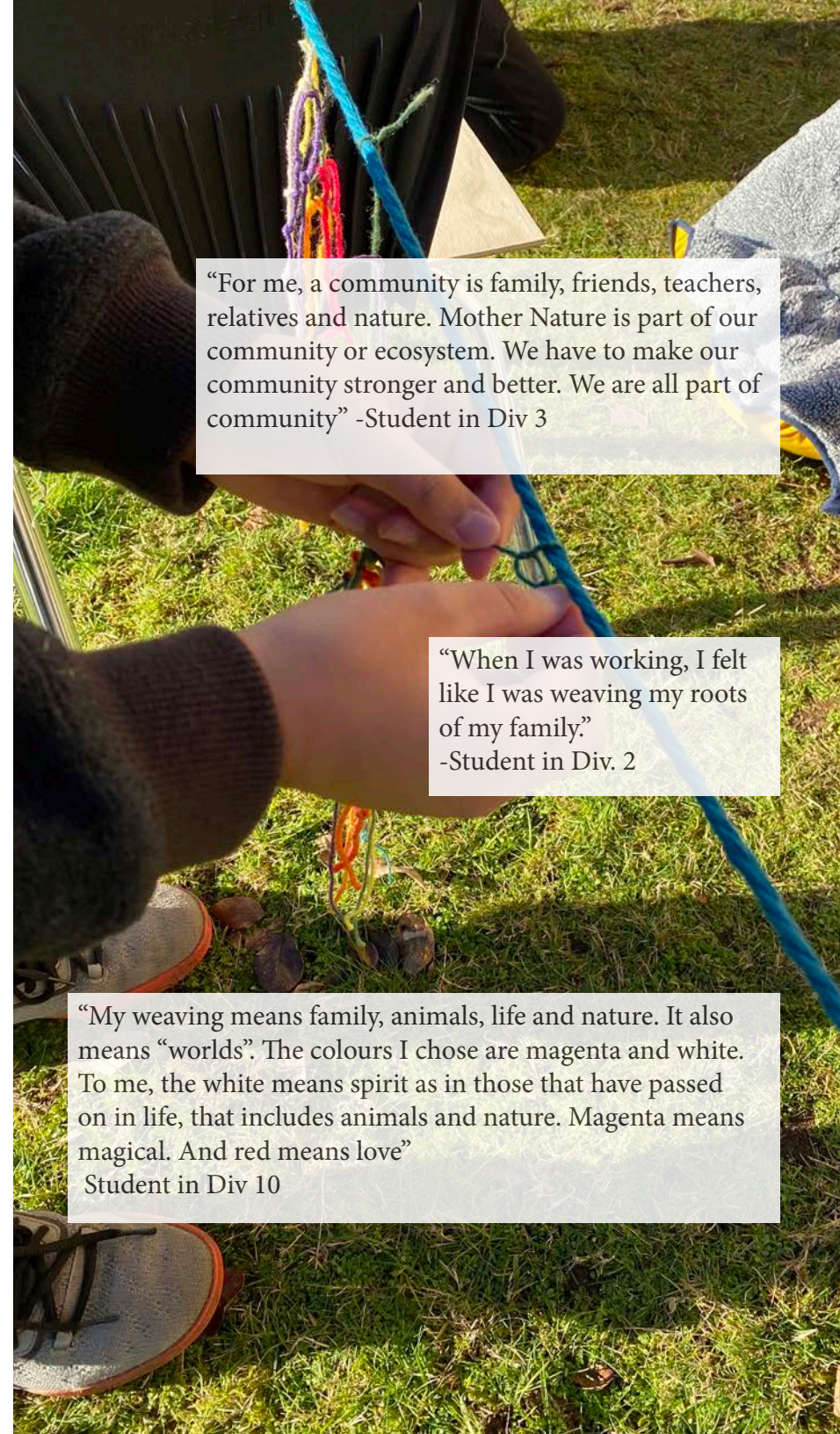
Our project process involves a collaborative installation piece intended to create a sense of hope and interconnectedness that reminds us of the importance of all our relationships. The art provocations provided multiple opportunities for students and teachers to explore identities: where we are in this moment, how we relate to ourselves, and the interconnections between ourselves and all the relationships in our lives. Storytelling, textiles and fibres focus these explorations.

In practicing Mayan oral traditions via personal stories, I provoked collaborators to trace their histories, emphasizing human rights, social justice and community building. Linking traditional Mayan textiles and fibre arts in the implementation furthers the dialogue of strengthening connections: multiple threads are needed to create a vibrant weaving just as many people are needed to create a vibrant and diverse social fabric.

Individual works possess imprinted stories and intimate meanings brought by each participant, embedding their identity into the artworks. Each piece contributes to the whole in a unique way; the works transform and strengthen each other when connected to one another, reminding us of the connections that we all share.

This explorative work acknowledges the complex social threads that link every one of us. Student stories are imprinted within the works, generating a new space for reflection. Acting as frames of hope, love, trust and resilience, the interlocking pieces respond to personal and collective longings for connection during a time where the quality of our shared space with one another is significantly reduced and reimaged.


The sustaining purpose of this project was to connect students with the opportunity that art provides us with: the opportunity to maintain openhearted communication and to honour student voices and experiences.



"For me, a community is family, friends, teachers, relatives and nature. Mother Nature is part of our community or ecosystem. We have to make our community stronger and better. We are all part of community" -Student in Div 3

"When I was working, I felt like I was weaving my roots of my family."
-Student in Div. 2

"My weaving means family, animals, life and nature. It also means "worlds". The colours I chose are magenta and white. To me, the white means spirit as in those that have passed on in life, that includes animals and nature. Magenta means magical. And red means love"
Student in Div 10



“We share our emotions with others and we share this land.”
-Kindergarten student

Trudeau Elementary continued

Artist: Augusta Lutynski

Kindergarten to Grade 3 students at Trudeau Elementary worked outdoors on a place-based art project at George Park, located two blocks from the school. The students explored the park with their senses and experienced the many sounds, smells, feelings, and sights within that space. The students noted the sounds of puddles and birds, the smell of trees, and the placement of rocks before sharing those experiences through storytelling, drawing, and making. Choosing one experience to work with for our final installation, the students made paper-mache art that tells a story of each of their experiences. Throughout their time making, some projects merged together and a few students ended up collaborating on shared experiences.

As part of the final class, students brought their objects of place back to George Park, and we held a temporary outdoor installation. The students placed their art contextually in the park and visited each of their classmate's works, reflecting on their unique experiences and collective experiences within that space. Spending time in George Park and deeply sensing the environment brought to light an intrinsic interconnectedness in shared space.

The students placed their art “to give space to grow”, “to protect from the wind”, “to be seen from far away by animals” while thinking about the dynamic experiences within the space of George Park. Offering their presence with people, animals and plants created an understanding of community at George Park and a shared feeling of belonging within that place.

Trudeau Teacher Observations:

Teachers found AIRS to be a meaningful experience during this pandemic year. Although it was more challenging behind the scenes, so many wonderful things happened. Through Alex's choice of stories, the students' understanding of values such as resilience, beauty, and altruism increased. His experiences celebrated disparate communities coming together to work collaboratively for the common good. Students referred to "weaving the roots of my family" and one teacher was inspired to move into creating personal-cultural portraits after the artist residency was over. They noticed that students were able to make increasingly abstract connections to the community and the self through utilizing the power of symbols such as the significance of their choices for colour, patterns and line. Alex tied together working with threads and words that help you stay strong with an emphasis on community building and connection.

In creating the weaving, students remembered all the people and places they were connected to. The project brought outcomes of joy and connection that helped students triumph over hardships brought by the pandemic. The exhibition had an impact on the school as it brought all artworks done by all students together in one context. It was almost irresistible to touch the works! Students felt compelled to physically connect with the work as each knot represented someone the students love.



“The students are going much deeper with symbols that bring personal and cultural richness”

-Trudeau teacher

Tecumseh Elementary

Artist: Julie McIntyre

Lead Teacher: Marion Collins

Principal: Vince Edwards

Quilt making is a form of cultural expression that transcends time and place. Quilts use patterns and symbols to stitch together material fragments into a meaningful expression of collective identity and belonging.

Working with 6 divisions across the school, Julie created quilt patterns that connected to their chosen thematic focus. Truth and Reconciliation was chosen as the theme of the quilt for Grades 5-7 as a way to synthesize their classroom studies on the topic. We looked at the secret codes behind quilt patterns from the underground railway, as well as symbolism in the “Witness Blanket”, “UBC Reconciliation Pole” and the “Quilt of Belonging” to explore how complex ideas can be expressed thoughtfully and effectively by community. In turn, we created quilt block patterns that gave students

the opportunity to communicate their own personality within the pattern, by choice of colour, pattern and placement.

For Division 6, Julie created a patchwork block pattern based on the traditional patterns of The Maple Leaf, Flying Geese and Crossroads as the backdrop to their exploration of Truth and Reconciliation. For Division 4, Julie combined the Basket Quilt, the Flying Geese pattern and the Log Cabin block to help them reconcile the ideals of Canada with its history.

Each class had a robust discussion around which quilt pattern to sew once the blocks were all glued together and backing added. Division 6 decided to stitch in the words “Rebuild, Hope Together, Promise” or “Listen Process Future Sharing” to literally and figuratively layer ideas and physical materials within the work. After a heated debate, Division 4 chose from the quilt patterns of Tape, Turtle, 7 Stars and Keys that Julie created for them.

When all quilt blocks were combined together, the classes witnessed that the whole was indeed greater than the sum of the parts, but also how crucial each piece was to the look of the whole.





Tecumseh Teacher Observations:

Teachers observed that AIRS was universally well received and all students were engaged. Each class chose a topic such as Truth and Reconciliation. Deciding as a class on a topic made the quilt important to the students and tied it to their academic investigations. Students were passive at first as if they were watching a TV show. It took a while for them to understand that they were going to be quilting too! It was initially a barrier to go up to the screen and ask questions, but Option 4 at-home learners were not shy online. All students loved receiving the special materials that were dropped off at the school. One teacher described two boys who brought one thing with them when they returned to school after a year at home due to Covid: their quilt squares!

Teachers described the importance of building something together as a community. Each square was necessary to complete the quilt and students

also had to rely on each other because the work was difficult and challenging. Students moved around to help each other with the complicated patterns. It took two hands to hold the fabric steady and it looked like a quilting bee as students quilted text onto their squares.

Students who might be nervous for wide-open-ended art activities were pulled in with the structure of shapes and patterns. Julie worked her way down from the oldest to the youngest students so she was adapting all the way. Though quilting was complex for younger students, Julie was responsive to where kids were at and constantly changed and adapted her approach. Principal Vince noted that this was a great example to students of how adults also consider “what worked?” “what didn’t work?” and “how can I change and improve?” Thanks to Julie’s adaptation, frustration was rarely experienced. A student with cerebral palsy was helped by another student to move the shapes around and many students demonstrated phenomenal fine motor skills as they completed their projects.

"Two boys brought one thing with them when they returned to school after a year at home due to Covid: their quilt squares!"

-Tecumseh teacher

"The quilts were so colourful and joyous. AIRS was a bright light in the year."

-Tecumseh teacher

Teachers noted that quilting took a long time and it was wonderful for students have the experience of mastery rather than just getting through something quickly. They had to take time to measure and be precise. One student really wanted to take his work home. Although his teacher was hesitant given the small pieces that could be lost or forgotten, she allowed him to do so. The next morning, he exclaimed, "I stayed up all night sewing!"

Teachers observed that combining quilting with a unit on angles and geometry would have worked well. After the AIRS program, students used their sewing skills to create another badge about Truth and Reconciliation. Teachers commented that this was possible because students already knew the skills rather than spending the whole class threading needles. Communicating in new ways about important topics and having a context within which to experience the personal investment that comes when you problem-solve and work through a challenge were other benefits of quilting.

"It has been the year of having to say 'no.' This was the one yes."

-Principal Vince



Thunderbird Elementary

Artist: Guna Jensen

Lead Teachers: Courtney Vuorma and Terrie Low

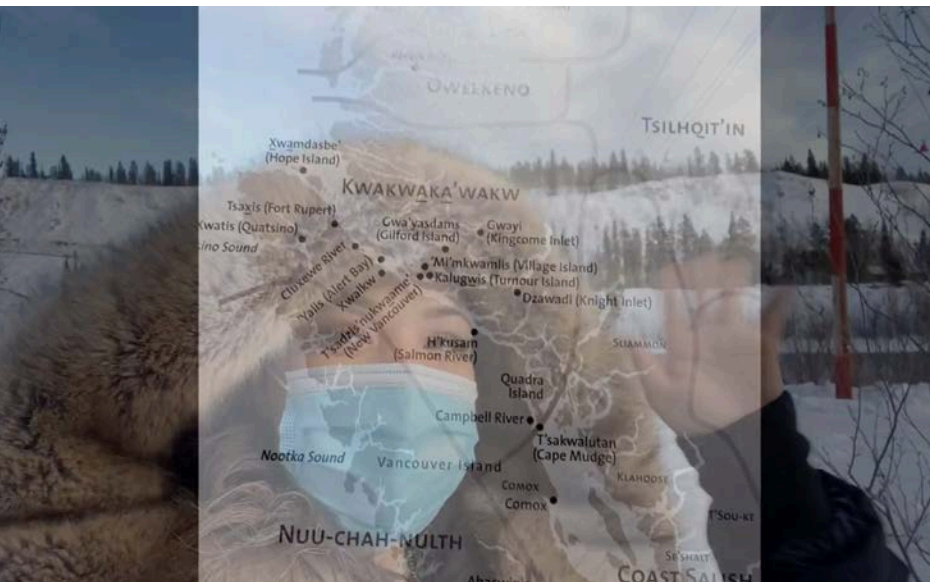
Principal: Tassie Harris

The arts have always been a source of solace and healing, and I believe that in the context of the COVID 19 pandemic, our children will need the arts more than ever. All children and youth deserve to have the space to creatively reflect on their experiences in life, which assists them in feeling more grounded as they explore their own thoughts and emotions amidst a chaotic world. Art holds the power to create spaces of peace, sanctuary and safety. These are all characteristics of an environment that is needed more than ever for our students.

This project was a year-long artistic exchange across distance between myself, Guna (Megan) Jensen, in the Yukon and Thunderbird students in Vancouver. Through a series of pre-recorded videos, I shared important aspects of Island Tlingit culture and guided students into individual art projects using both conventional and unconventional materials, allowing students to respond in safe and meaningful ways. After the completion of each project, I met with classes through Teams for a time of dialogue and sharing together. Cultural themes encompass speaking to the Land, beading, Tlingit language, dance and formline. These themes of culture are intertwined with universal concepts such as friendship, strength, courage, and personal and collective healing by strengthening the connections of our community.

As a Tlingit instructor, I see it as a responsibility to always utilize Indigenous-based methodologies that will assist students to develop the capacity to engage in topics and discussions of culture and diversity. The removal of prejudices is of paramount importance, as this too plays an integral role in students developing unity in their classrooms. Unity, solidarity and healing are at the heart of this project, and this is what the world is in need of most right now, and in the years to come. This work is necessary and vital if we are to even begin speaking of participating in reconciliation. Student reflections capture the power of connection with one another through the sharing of culture.

“I learned that sometimes it just takes time to make something beautiful.”
-Thunderbird student





“Listening to Ms. Guna talk about culture and language made me feel comfortable talking about my own culture too.”

“Dancing with Guna reminded me what it was like being in my old home. That’s how we used to dance there.”

“I think culture is beautiful.”

-Thunderbird students

“These classes have helped me understand how hard but beautiful the Tlingit art form is to learn.”

“I learned how to dance like a warrior.”

“I loved working with all the different beautiful colours.”

“Before I didn’t really know who raven was, but now I do.”



Thunderbird Teacher Observations

Teachers appreciated that there was a point of entry for every student. They noted that the younger students often play with natural materials outside so collecting natural materials for art was second nature for them. The artistic practices encouraged by Guna supported the SEL focus for the school. Students were engaged and challenging behaviours disappeared during art time. Gratitude has been a part of some classes' SEL practice, and it was rewarding to see the students move spontaneously into a goodbye gratitude circle to thank Ms. Guna at the end of her lesson.

Teachers reflected that because the younger students are so comfortable with their predictable routines, they were impressed with the flexibility of students as they engaged with new experiences outside of what they expected.

Students were excited to make art! Lessons such as pointillism and language learning were memorable, and the self-portraits were a favourite of the younger students. It was helpful to learn specific painting techniques and the older classes appreciated the authentic cultural component.

Challenges included the fact that Guna joined the classes remotely from the Yukon. Teachers missed having her there to interpret and instruct in the moment. She met the students for reflections on Teams, but connecting only virtually was a challenge. She recorded incredible videos sharing her experiences up north which gave students a front row seat connecting to her life.



Henderson Elementary:

Artist: Alanna Ho and Amanda Wood

Lead Teacher: Johnny Wu

Principal: Harjinder Sandhu

The BIG Picture engages students in interdisciplinary collaboration through the idea of a score, and material exploration. Students reflect on aspects of our world that have remained the same over the past few months, and use this as a source of data to inform the process of translating between sound and hands-on making. Ideas and sounds generated by the intermediates will be carried into the primary classes and back again.

The goal of this year's residency was to connect students with ways of noticing, particularly through mindful listening. From movement games to collaborative activities, the classes had a collage of experiences which challenged their senses and kept them on their feet. The grade fours travelled to the top of the Eiffel Tower in Paris, train stations in Hamburg, and bustling street markets in Cambodia. They walked in the middle of highways, swam with communicating whales, and listened to high-heels militantly clack back and forth invigilating an exam. We then went outside to listen deeply and draw sound maps while the kindergarten class was playing on a nearby playground.

Students have been so affected in their social lives especially before school started in Fall, 2020, so it was fascinating to see how they connected their emotions with sound.

We also used simple circuits to create quick prototypes for sound-making machines. Using LittleBits Technology, scrap found objects, metal, wood, cardboard and objects brought from home, the students worked in groups to realize a whimsical sculpture--some whirring loudly, some subtly buzzing and some kling-klanging, breaking apart as they performed a sound.

The Covid-19 pandemic challenges us to give extra care and attention to our health and that of others:

-Can we create a collective shared experience by just listening with our bodies?

-How can youth continue to explore their senses and express their feelings in a safe and open-ended way?

-What are our limits on patience?



Henderson: Amanda Wood

How can we exchange ideas and connect through mail?

How has life stayed the same even though lots of things have changed lately?

In late April and May, primary students explored their senses through material-based art experiments virtually with Amanda. Students will transcend digital modes of learning by creating and exchanging physical work in the form of mail art and responding to prompts that are given in exchange. Resulting work will be collected, curated and shared with the school community in a hallway installation in conversation with sense-based installations created by Alanna Ho and the intermediate students.

The intention is to shift our thinking about what can be art and to experience art creation in ways that are not necessarily vision-centred nor based on traditional methods of creating. Students will explore collaboration through exchanges of instructions, materials, ideas and images, mimicking ways that we exchange information digitally in a physical and tangible way. Digital glitches, frozen screens, and other technical considerations will become part of the materials that we work with.



Henderson Teacher Observations:

Teachers observed that the students looked forward to the sessions and enjoyed working with the artist directly when physical distancing was possible in the gym. Alanna and Amanda brought an artistic energy and the spirit of artist to the school. The focus on process resonated as students learned to use sound as their artistic medium. The artists allowed space for risk-taking. For example, when asked a simple question such as “what could be woven?”, students found unusual items to weave such as a PlayStation controller and jewelry. The students also used Little Bits to create machines with sound and developed their STEM skills through building simple machines and using coding. A spectrum of student strengths were tapped into throughout the process and big ideas such as movement, time, and space were examined through the artwork.

Next year, teachers look forward to building the flow and connection of the projects from session to session, across the school, and increasingly finding ways to tie the art into their classroom learning.



Moberly Elementary

Artist: Pia Massey

Lead Teachers: Gabi Lutynski and Alison Sauder

Principal: Henry Au

Gardens of Belonging

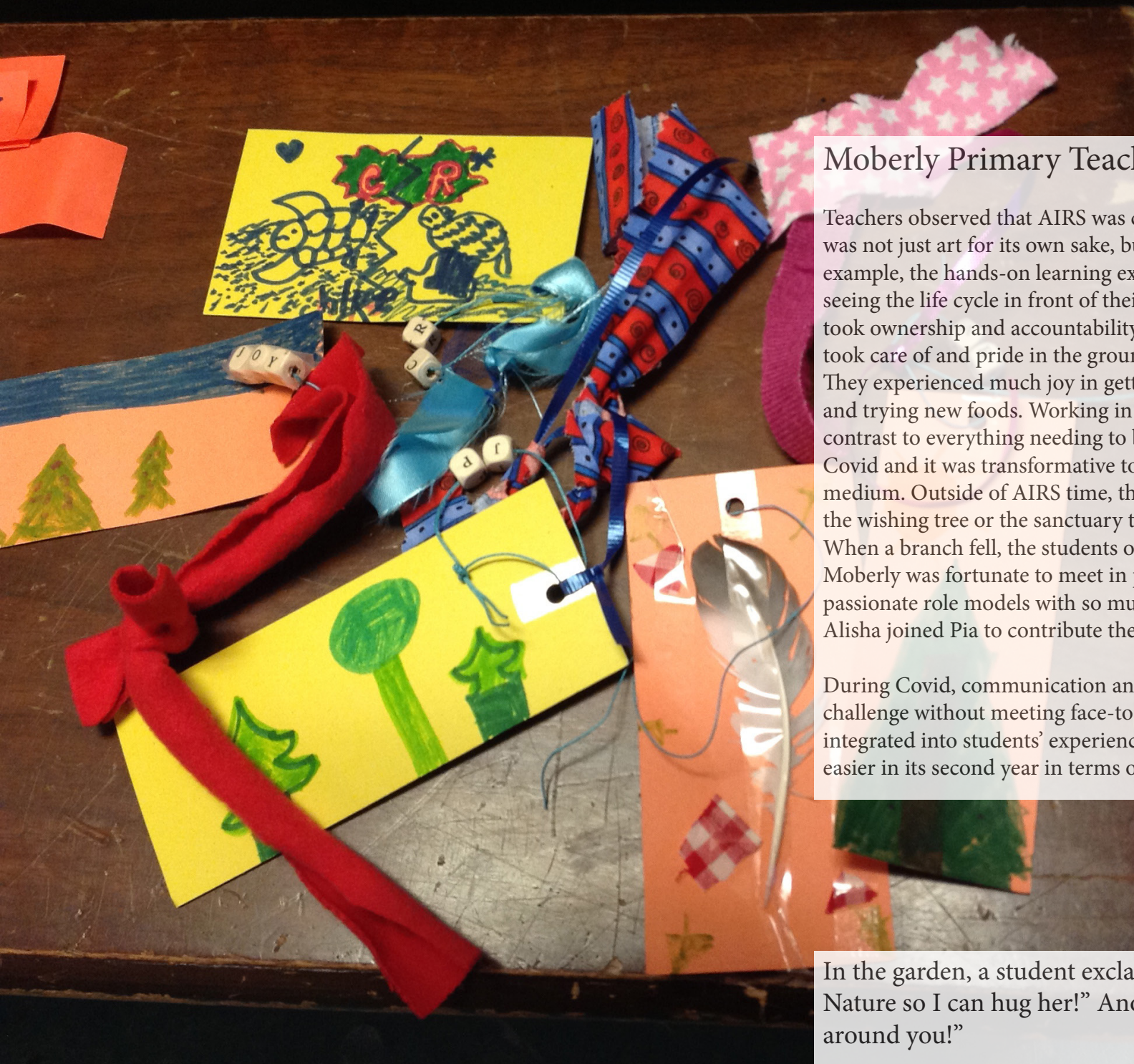


Working with the Moberly school was such a pleasure in the spring of 2020 that I was really happy to be able to extend and build on that work, returning this year for 3 semesters, to share time with 6 classes and create the Gardens of Belonging.

The fundamental core of this work is to create connection. Grounding the kids in their relationships — to each other and to the animals, land and water, that we all depend on. We worked with my friend, Lori Snyder, who helps take care of the Medicine Garden, located right across the field from the school at the Moberly Arts Centre. Lori is the founder of Earth Awareness Realized Through Health and Company. Two other gardeners - Jacob Fischer-Schmidt (Soaring Eagle school) and Alisha Lettman (Legacy Growers Collective) - also shared their wisdom and playfulness with us this year. The kids were extremely lucky to have the attention of sometimes 6 adults working with them in our outdoor explorations. A lot of big listening can happen with such intimate groups, especially when you are outside in a garden! In the fall curriculum “Listening to Trees”, we collected leaves, mapped trees, and learned to write our names in tree typography as we took care of the grounds of the Medicine Garden. There was a tree that had been hurt and so it was the major project of the fall to clean up and care for this tree which became the wishing tree for the two older classes. The kids took tender pride in the sanctuary that they had created, where they could sit, talk, climb, create and/or just listen to the local hummingbird.

In the winter curriculum “Dreaming Animals”, we thought about the homes of animals and what they ate and needed for safety and survival. Each child chose an animal to draw and learn about. We discussed what their favourite fruits and vegetables were to prepare for the garden planting in the spring and created gratitude jars. The large Douglas Fir had gifted us a huge bough in a fall windstorm, which dried and was ultimately used to make incense cones. Trish's class also raised and cared for salmon fry and butterflies, who will be released in the garden in late spring. As we head into the spring semester, the youngest kids will be planting and caring for the garden boxes in front of the school.

It has given me great joy to build a studio space where community can connect and create, find their own voices and sources of comfort and happiness as they work with materials that come naturally to them. It is with enormous gratitude that we continue to work together on the traditional unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples.



Moberly Primary Teacher Observations:

Teachers observed that AIRS was conducive to making art that was not just art for its own sake, but was part of learning. For example, the hands-on learning experienced through students seeing the life cycle in front of their eyes was impactful. Students took ownership and accountability for watering the garden. They took care of and pride in the grounds and picking up garbage. They experienced much joy in getting their hands dirty, creating, and trying new foods. Working in the dirt was such a stark contrast to everything needing to be so clean and sterile during Covid and it was transformative to experience the earth as a medium. Outside of AIRS time, the students would ask to go to the wishing tree or the sanctuary tree and the Medicinal Garden. When a branch fell, the students observed that the “tree is thirsty”. Moberly was fortunate to meet in person outside with talented, passionate role models with so much to share. Lori, Jacob and Alisha joined Pia to contribute their knowledge as well.

During Covid, communication and coordination has been a challenge without meeting face-to-face, but AIRS has now been integrated into students’ experience of learning at Moberly. It was easier in its second year in terms of timing and organization.

In the garden, a student exclaims: “I want to see Mother Nature so I can hug her!” Another responds: “She’s all around you!”

Moberly Intermediate:

We Think, See, Feel Belonging

Artist: Yunuen Perez Verrti

Lead Teacher: Tim Oftebro

Principal: Henry Au

The vision for this media arts residency was to introduce or deepen students' visual language skills by producing poetry films inspired by the theme of belonging. We all have an inherent desire to belong and be an important part of something greater than ourselves. This residency aimed to help students connect and reflect on their belongingness while using filmmaking as a tool of engagement.

We used the following questions as exploration on what belonging means:

Who are the important people in your life?

What are things you like about yourself?

Where is the place where you feel more comfortable and accepted?

Students reflected on these questions individually and connected with other students by sharing their reflections and finding commonalities that led them to create one haiku per group. The haiku included parts of everyone's reflection or concepts that the entire group had in common. Through various playful hands-on exercises, the students translated the poem into a series of images representing their poetry. Students explored sound design techniques by adding voice-over, sounds or music to their pieces and enhancing them with graphics. The integration of filmmaking created a space where students could construct and understand abstract concepts through a fun and exciting art form.

"We were able to record videos with lots of freedom. I like how we had no restrictions and we could follow multiple concepts."

-Moberly Student

I learned how to record a video with a steady hand and not to follow an object but to wait for whatever you are recording to come into the frame.

-Moberly Student

I learned that art can be shown in different ways with poems, film, chalk and things like that.

-Moberly Student

I learned how to express my haiku poem in video. I want to know what it is like to be a filmmaker.

-Moberly Student



Moberly Intermediate Teacher Observations:

Teachers expressed how meaningful it was to use visually expressive language to explore the idea of “belonging”. Turning a haiku or diamante into a visual format explored how communication might be amplified. The students created an iMovie based on their poem and used humour to make creative connections when choosing things to film. They incorporated creative spins on the use of visual language. Through iteration, students learned and used the processes of filmmaking. As they made intentional choices about angles, zoom, perspective, splicing and sound, students saw ways to make their work more impactful. Teachers observed that students are still talking about the project.

The students also loved working with Paulo and Lisa from Moberly Arts. They found it exciting to collaborate with them and respected how “good they are at what they do.”

Students enjoyed getting outside and appreciated having autonomy and choice over what they wanted to film. Teachers valued stepping back and seeing students in a different light. As a teacher, watching the process gave a new perspective on students’ strengths and stretches. It was also an opportunity to support at-risk students.

“Engaging students is the goal we all share”
-Moberly Teacher



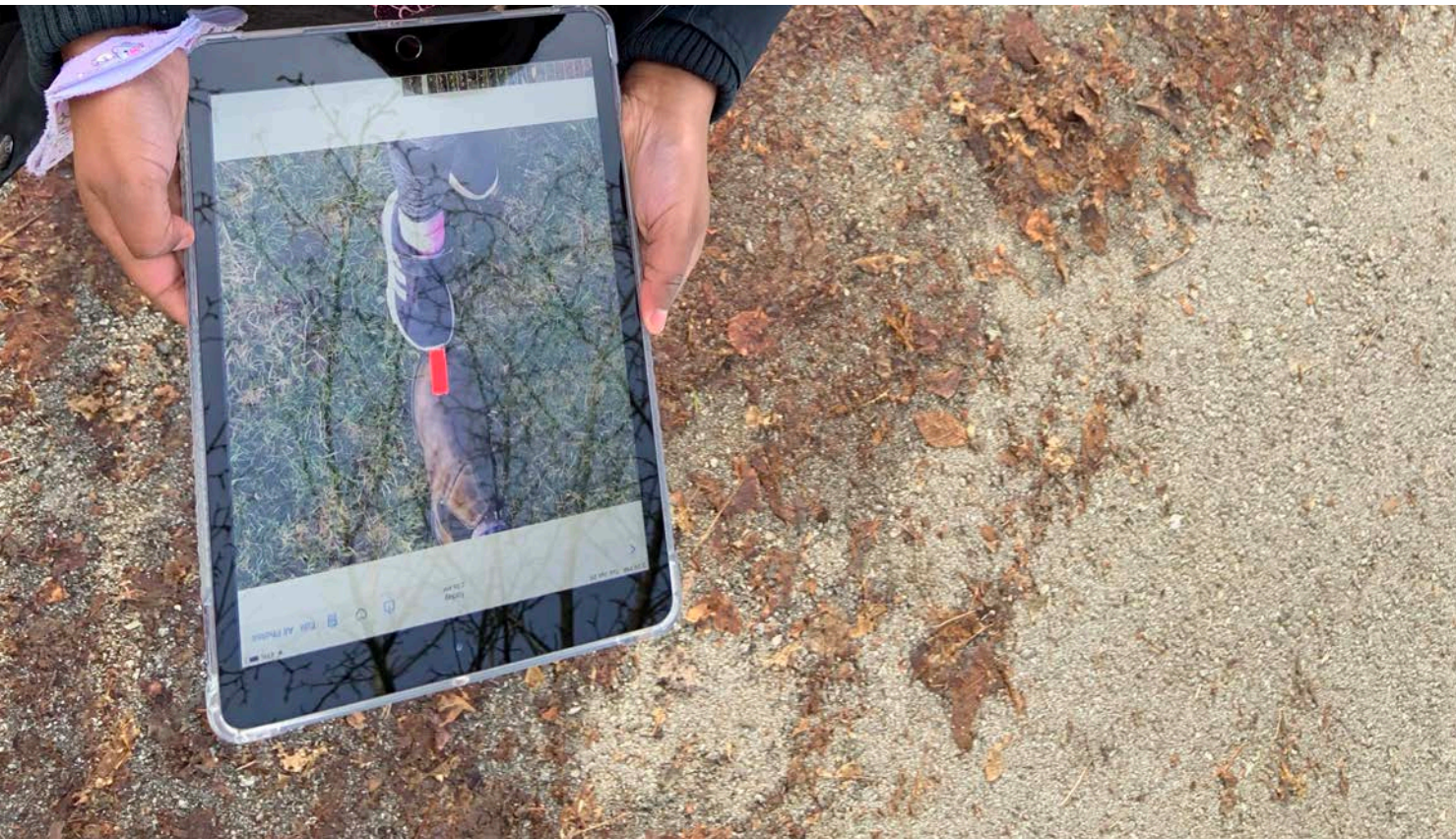
Bruce Elementary

Artist: Alysha Seriani

Lead Teachers: Leslie Learmonth

Principal: Karen Noel Bentley

For the inaugural Media Arts residency at Graham D. Bruce Elementary school, students were invited to use iPads as potential extensions of our bodies as recording devices: to “download” the way we receive light, time, movement, sound, and other senses. Each week presented an inquiry into how to use a tablet as a tool or even a toy, and to notice how playing allows us to access the full range of our senses while transmitting a record of what is happening around and within us. Working with stop-motion and experimental animation, acoustic ecology, time-lapse photography, and compositing, we collectively created media art outside the linear progression of pre-production, production, post-production to instead orient ourselves towards emergent time, space and body-awareness practices.



“It was different going outside to do tech. I pushed myself further”
-Grade 3 student

Bruce Teacher Observations:

Teachers noted Alysha's strong focus on SEL. By checking in with students at the beginning and the end of class, she established rapport that allowed them to express how they were feeling. It was clear that Alysha valued each student. Using open-ended questions such as "where are we?", Alysha introduced a new perspective to the students. Through focusing on information from the senses outdoors, students connected with place. They were engaged with creating stop-motion animations using letters of their name. Teachers found that students wished for more than six sessions in order to integrate their learning through further repetition and improvement. They look forward to making further use of the techniques they were introduced to.

Teachers noticed that the Core Competency Creativity was practiced throughout the process in Alysha's encouragement of open-ended artmaking. Principles of First People's Learning were brought in through being outside to practice careful observation and reflection and giving time that allowed for flexibility and interpretation. Teachers also acknowledged the importance of students having an outlet other than writing with which to express themselves. Today, communication is rarely based solely on writing which is why it is critical for students to be fluent in visual modes of communication.

