



Framework for Enhancing Student Learning School Plan



Our Story

What are the unique, positive characteristics of our school?

Q'shintul - Mill Bay Nature School – is moving into its fourth year – presently for children ages 4 to 11 (*and growing to include 12 -14 year olds in the years to come*) - situated in the Warm Land of the Cowichan Valley – the beautiful traditional territory of the Hulq'umi'num' People who have lived in this place for 10,000 years. We have taken root – over the past three years of our enactment - in a developing relationship with the Cowichan, Malahat, and Penelakut Peoples – walking together with our elders-in-residence Tousilum and Salsa'meethl George – and seek to build a place that honours the natural rhythms of *this* place, the lessons learned over millennia, and the structures of a Village (community) that honours and



ultimately serves the Xe' Xe' Smune'em – *our sacred children*. We enact the First Peoples Principles of Learning because they reflect the natural rhythms of a healthy, sustainable ecosystem – and we see this in the development of children with strong voices, respectful hearts, and brilliant minds who are known and know others – even as

they struggle *with* and learn *from* diverse ways of being and seeing and knowing. The staff is committed to an emergent curriculum which flows from provocations, questions, challenges, and the living of life in a community of people; they may begin in the mind of a child, an adult, or a Hulq'umi'num' elder. An attention to emergence requires nimble and agile responsiveness, and a willingness to walk together – *Q'shintul* – as we discover and learn. The staff are also committed to the





development of core competencies (*described in the B.C. Curriculum*) within themselves and the children: critical, creative and reflective thinking; personal development; social understanding and engagement; and robust, expansive communication skills – because we know how critical these are for lifelong engagement in an ever-changing, unpredictable

world. At Mill Bay Nature School, learning is intentionally embedded in *everything* we do – loose parts, schedules, activities, field studies, rhythms, experiences, inside and outside design, Village meetings, fundraising, and on and on – and we invite each one to take up a spirit of playfulness and inquiry whilst knowing (*through research*) that deep abiding relationships precede a willingness to take risks, step out of our comfort zones, and try new things. Our morning soft-starts have a feeling of a family reunion, and our restorative justice circles (*always-in-the-making*) end with a movement towards forgiveness – *blowing the problem away even as we own what we did to another*. We like being together here; it's hard, muddy work, invigorating, messy, and inspiring.



What are the important demographics of our school and community?



The roots of Mill Bay Nature School are digging deep into the rich, beautiful culture of the Hulq'umi'num' People, as well as the story of the genocide they have had to endure through Residential Schools and Government Policies (*which still exist*) – guided by elders and knowledge keepers –

drummers, singers, storytellers, artists. Beginning in *this* place, with *these* people and *these* stories, the staff and families – from all over the District - have been learning alongside the



children; together, we have come to deeply value these gifts.

Although most of our families and staff are of European ancestry (within a continuum of socio-economic advantages and family structures), we are attracting families who have immigrated from other places; are slowly developing trusting relationships with Hulq'umi'num' families; and are excited to invite a teacher with Cree roots in the Fall. It is our dream that one day our school will become more richly diverse, and in doing so, weave within our children (and ourselves) a lived curriculum of beautiful, unthreatening differences that they will take with

them into adulthood – “... *the myriad of cultures of the world are not failed attempts at modernity. They are unique expressions of the human imagination and heart, unique answers to a fundamental question: What does it mean to be human and alive?*” (Wade Davis). The more diversity - that can be expansively understood - the more space for acceptance of self, others, and the world; nurturing healthsome, respectful living – an important outcome of education.

What do we celebrate?

At Q'shintul, first and foremost we honour the'Xe 'Xe Smune'em – our sacred children; each morning you will witness the staff greeting each one as they emerge from cars or jump off buses. There is a spirit of playfulness and joy here. There are smiles and hugs. People know each other here and are known - leading to trust and rest in relationships – particularly as children transition from home to school or from stress to rest. As a community we often collectively repeat “*attention = love, attention = respect*” –





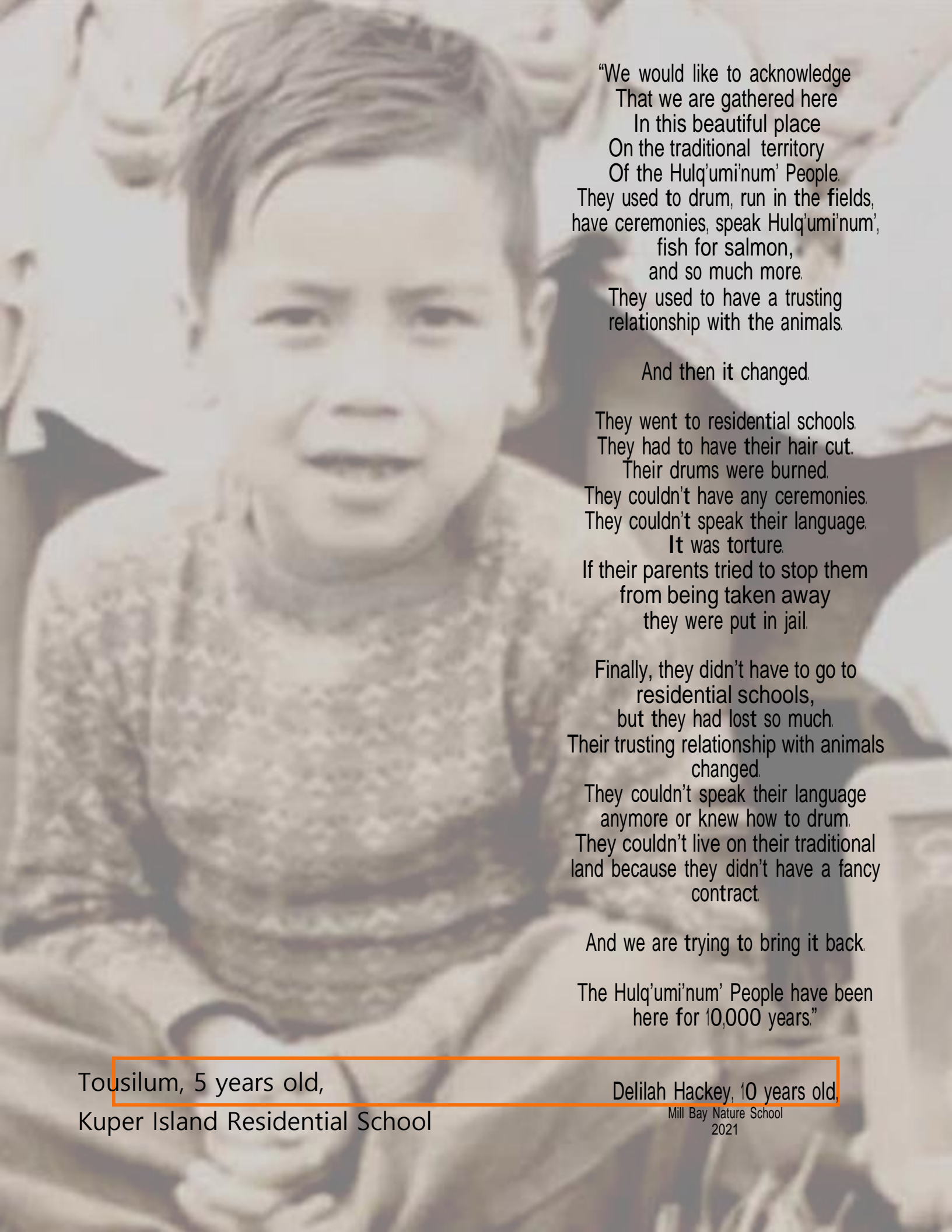
reminding ourselves (adult and child) to intentionally bring our whole hearts and minds to our work/play. Families are included in Learning Map Meetings which provide a context from which our understanding of children emerges as well as deepens. Children are spoken about with respect in all spaces and at all times at our school. Each Friday we have a whole school birthday honouring

circle where each child or adult who had a birthday that past week sits in the large cedar ‘throne’ dubbed the Wilder Honouring Chair (after Wilder World, the brother of Levi and Oakley and son of Pam and Travis, who passed away tragically June 2019) and a special adult witnesses their growth, development, and unique gifts/talents as the whole school community witnesses and waits excitedly for their turn. Staff are also honoured in this way.

We also celebrate the beauty of the Hulq’umi’num’ culture, as well as their sad history each day through the recitation of our child designed and led acknowledgement (see next page). Drum Circles and Storytelling begin and end our week as we gather as a whole school in our outside circle – keeping Hulq’umi’num’ culture at the front of our minds and hearts.



We have also shifted to a consensus building model gifted to us by Tousilum and Sulsa’meethl George which celebrates the deep value of all voices being heard, decisions taking the time they take, and the role of leadership being one of listening deeply and discerning what consensus is emerging (as we acknowledge it’s always-in-the-making). In these ways (and others), we take up the challenge of Truth and Reconciliation (as outlined in the Calls To Action).



"We would like to acknowledge
That we are gathered here
In this beautiful place
On the traditional territory
Of the Hulq'umi'num' People.
They used to drum, run in the fields,
have ceremonies, speak Hulq'umi'num',
fish for salmon,
and so much more.
They used to have a trusting
relationship with the animals.

And then it changed.

They went to residential schools.
They had to have their hair cut.
Their drums were burned.
They couldn't have any ceremonies.
They couldn't speak their language.
It was torture.
If their parents tried to stop them
from being taken away
they were put in jail.

Finally, they didn't have to go to
residential schools,
but they had lost so much.
Their trusting relationship with animals
changed.
They couldn't speak their language
anymore or knew how to drum.
They couldn't live on their traditional
land because they didn't have a fancy
contract.

And we are trying to bring it back.

The Hulq'umi'num' People have been
here for 10,000 years."

Tousilum, 5 years old,
Kuper Island Residential School

Delilah Hackey, 10 years old,
Mill Bay Nature School
2021

Our Learners

What are the strengths and stretches we see in our Learners?
What evidence do we have of these strengths and stretches?

For the mornings, our children are organized (with a particular focus on core competency development) into multi-age groupings: Dandelion Pod of three Clans (ages 4-8); Cedar Pod of three Clans (ages 6-10); Smuqwa Pod of two Clans (ages 8-12). Clan time has a focus on building



community with diverse others, literacy, and numeracy development. And for the afternoons, our Dandelion and Cedar children are engaged together in self-selected, interdisciplinary Playful Inquiries of ever-changing groups and open-ended design for six-week



cycles. The Smuqwa Clan - the middle years program *ever-in-the-making* – are designing their full days with: on the land learning; interdisciplinary studies; mentorships; and other uncertain and magical mysteries that tend to emerge (for example - surprise visits by elders, opportunities to plant trees with ‘found’ money).

For our Dandelions, the structure, design, rhythms, and protocols of Mill Bay Nature School are full of rigor for their developing young brains:

finding friends on a huge field; helping to vote on/make school rules; finding adults when there’s a problem or conflict; walking long distances for bathroom or water breaks; remembering where you put your shoes or backpack or stuffy; sitting respectfully for an hour in whole school circles; listening to the moose horn for ten minute warnings and the call to Clans; putting their bikes





away and heading to their work independently; Playful Inquiries with older students; learning how to own your mistakes and apologize; watching the Cedars jump onto the huge rolling tubes with wonder, and watching the Smuqwas jump OVER the tubes with astonishment.

One day ...

We have witnessed the development of children like Eric – *amongst many others* - who began formal schooling with us at four years old. An only child, Eric rode in a protective womb-like space within his mother Erin's bike, and refused to emerge for months. We encouraged Erin to persevere, to encourage Eric, to bring him to the school after-hours to tend to the new garden, to show him the safe, trusting adults he could count on, to dance beside the bike at the end of our days as children waited to be picked up. Some days she wondered. Some days she cried. Some days she asked questions. We walked alongside her with patience and love discovering that Eric's experiences at preschool had primed his brain for resistance – *so, now what?* Finally, when he decided to emerge, after months of waiting, Erin walked with Eric to his Clan – carrying all his belongings; and they stayed for a wee bit. And then more. And more. And finally, he sauntered across the field by himself with his backpack dragging behind him, and his mom nervously edging her way away from the field. His Clan leader was patient and encouraging, and his peers playful and curious. His belonging and acceptance was a gift - not something he had to earn; Eric felt this and leaned into it – when he was ready. And his roots began to sink even deeper as he sat during drumming circles on the front log completely silent and fully engrossed in the Hulq'umi'num' beats. By the spring, Eric was showing more spontaneity and joy; one day he was even witnessed by a group of Smuqwa running towards his friends in the back field with a 'full moon' laughing and laughing *and laughing*. They couldn't believe it was the same kid! Still quiet at school, Erin commented



that Eric was trying out a lot of new things at home – swearing, teaching new Hulq’umi’num words to his family, and learning how to own his mistakes. And on this foundation, this deep root growth, the hope of continued emergence and development come Fall.

For our Cedars, the structure, design, rhythms, and protocols of Mill Bay Nature School are fodder for their developing thinking skills

(critical, creative, reflective), growing

agency/voice, and sense of social/community

dynamics: critiquing school rules; adding new rules, guidelines and structures which solve emerging problems; beginning to problem solve on their own, and discerning when they need assistance; walking long distances for bathroom or



water breaks and finding their way back; supporting younger children to find their shoes or



backpack or stuffy; voicing questions/offering feedback during whole school circles; suggesting that the Moose Call to Clans needs to have warnings – *but how long?*; not using other people’s bikes without asking; setting up a bike lending library; Playful Inquiries with younger students to develop compassion, practice leadership, and witnessing how

far they have come as learners/as humans; practicing honesty even when it’s super embarrassing; asking themselves if they are ready to be a Smuqwa ...

We have witnessed the substantial development of children like Delilah and Lucy – *amongst many others* – who have come to Mill Bay Nature School after having very challenging experiences at other schools: Delilah, whose speech was almost unintelligible, and who had come to MBNS as a new beginning after suspicion of ‘all-things-school’ entered her heart; Lucy, who was asked to not attend Kindergarten at her previous school because of her violent

outbursts, spent the first day at MBNS sitting on the field in a hula-hoop as she sized up this unfamiliar place.

Delilah's arm shot up during the first Fall of MBNS when Kim asked who would like to lead our Hulq'umi'num' land

acknowledgement. (Kim was shocked as Delilah refused to look at, speak to, receive from her throughout the first two years at MBNS.) This became the therapy



Delilah needed (as well as singing Taylor Swift songs on the outdoor stage during Free Play). Delilah has created the most beautiful and powerful acknowledgement we have witnessed over the past three years (with the support of her family proud of their Indigenous roots). Delilah is a leader in our community who has been known to wait up to five minutes for the circle to be respectfully silent before she begins the acknowledgement, and recently, when a beloved teacher left the school, Delilah spontaneously stood up in front of everyone - *Well, when I first met you Amanda I was like ... thumbs up ... thumbs down ... I was suspicious. But then I figured out, you are the real deal, and that made me trust you. I love you Amanda and will miss you.*

Lucy was very resistant to relationship and trust for a long time. We had to work in ever-more creative and innovative ways with her family to disrupt her notions of authority and show her



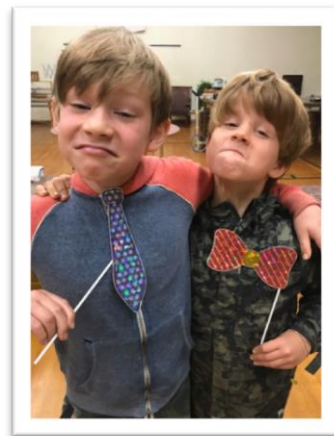
every day that she was loved and appreciated even when she made pretty big mistakes. This has been a three-year focus – *things take the time they take* – and we are so grateful that we have stayed the course and not given up on each other (and that children can be very forgiving). More able to use words, calm

through tea parties, and understand her triggers, Lucy has had a year of huge growth. She loves to sing and is particularly gifted at Broadway songs. So, she has been given the responsibility and privilege of leading the singing— during whole school circle gatherings with or without Hulq'umi'num' elders and knowledge keepers. She has learned how to respectfully gather people, speak to the drummers to coordinate start/stop timing, and leaves the area when frustrated or angry rather than acting out violently. Her peers see her as a leader, and she embodies the story of transformation, of not giving up on people even when they make big mistakes, and of the expansiveness and healing wonder of grace.



For our Smuqwa Clan, the structure, design, rhythms, and protocols of Mill Bay Nature School were found wanting midway through our second year. During Clan Time, they were challenged to build community, develop their literacy skills (which were lagging significantly due to difficult early childhood learning experiences), as well as take on numeracy challenges. During Playful Inquiry afternoons,

however, these children often spent more time supporting younger children through their explanations, their patience, their side-by-side explorations, their willingness to slow down - to thread needles, to push the jumps closer together - their willingness to help problem solve - a sharing of their attention away from *their* questions, *their* wonderings, the challenges *they* wished to tackle. And we wondered if this was *their* learning - this waiting, this self-regulation, this development of compassionate understanding. Maybe, because after all, these are core competencies. But, we sensed deep down that they longed for more. (Surprisingly not one older child complained aloud.) So, by witnessing their need in our hearts & spirits, we asked - *now what?*



At first, a courageous teacher suggested that perhaps the older children would find pitching and leading the Playful Inquiries (and being supported by a teacher) the challenge they were



missing - without removing their energy, spirit, and role modeling from Q'shintul. They studied the parts of a successful inquiry - from their perspective - and took it up. "Wow. It's a lot harder than it looks - this teaching," said one of the kid leaders. The sheer exhaustion and inability therefore to reflect upon the learning led us to believe that this was a premature step in development, and not one to press at the moment. So good to give it a go, so we learn ... *but not yet*.

And so we wondered: What might it look like to offer something to our older children? Something in keeping with what's emerged thus far: inquiry, a playful tone, hands-on and experiential learning which follows the lead or provocations of the children and is rooted in the core competencies and interdisciplinary content. Will they miss being with the young ones' joy-filled energy? Will they miss being the superheroes? The more accomplished?

Mill Bay Nature School has been led and inspired by Tousilum and Salsa'meethl George - our Hul'q'umi'num' elders-in-residence - since our inception; so when we began to look at a vision for our older children we involved them in the conversation: *Are you aware of how harsh racism is in the Cowichan Valley? Do you even understand the Indian Act? Coast Salish is an anthropological word - not indigenous. Are we creating this school for children from Cowichan and Malahat families too? How do we continue to decolonize education?*



These were powerful ideas to wrestle with - far beyond and far deeper than those outlined in our Field Guide. Hearing the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, we looked for seed money - so our elders and other Hul'q'umi'num' knowledge keepers could lead us on a journey in the service of our eldest children.

Middle Years University Researcher (U.B.C.) and B.C. Curriculum writer (English language arts) Dr. Leyton Schnellert had also been looking at Mill Bay Nature School - curious of its evolution, its growth and challenges. Also interested in the development of innovative rural school programs, Leyton was willing to guide us through the perceived



complexities of curriculum and the particular developmental needs of adolescent brains. First, though, could he help us elucidate a vision and write a grant?! And so, gratefully and with awe we received \$20,000 seed money from the Vancouver Foundation, and we took up the question (even with COVID restrictions): How can we co-compose - with our elders-in-residence, Hul'q'umi'num' elders, students, school staff, district leadership, university researchers, and community members - an embedded, land based Hul'q'umi'num' immersion middle school at



Mill Bay Nature School ? (This story to be shared in August.)

Our Goals

Based on the needs in our school and the Strategic plan, what priorities will we focus on to enhance success for our learners?

At Mill Bay Nature School we define *success* as the learning, unlearning, and re-learning – *for one's entire life journey* – of the traits of The Educated Citizen. This capacity is cultivated and nurtured through the enactment of the principles and philosophy of our *always-in-the-making* Field Guide (which walks parallel with the Strategic Plan). With this in mind, for next year, we will be focusing upon these priorities:

I. Learning

- **A.) The intentional creation of structures, rhythms, protocols in the *everyday* enacted culture of our school that introduce, develop, and nurture literacy (reading & viewing; writing & representing; speaking & listening) in our children, as well as a deepening understanding of the underlying brain processes – for teachers, support staff, and parents – so that literacy becomes a joy filled, deeply valued part of our school culture and each child can see their growth over time.**



Actions/Embodiment (to support goal):

- Using our non-contact time creatively with a literacy focus *with team teaching* to provide 4 hours a week to each Dandelion and Cedar Clan (Opportunities for teachers to observe and work alongside the Literacy Lead.)
- Hiring a Humanities Lead for the Smuqwa Clan so literacy can be intentionally woven throughout their days leading to ever-more positive attitudes about Literacy and Literacy development

- Collectively inviting our Literacy Lead teacher to be the one to orient our shared understandings of how literacy develops in children over time (using a robust, neurobiological model) and then weaving that understanding into Playful Inquiries/Interdisciplinary Work
- Re-imagining our library space as a literacy development space with opportunities to play with language as well as dig deep into literacy challenges through a variety of provocations
- Purchasing more rolling white boards and chalk boards *to be used outside* to make the powerful oral messages in circle visible in print

Evidence of Learning (street & satellite data):

- Dandelion, Cedar, and Smuqwa ‘Writes’ (Three times a year – September, January, May):
 - assessed by teachers using B.C. Performance Standards
 - qualitatively reflected on by children and parents using an open-ended questionnaire
- Dandelion, Cedar, and Smuqwa Reading Assessments (Three times a year – September, January, May) using laminated book pages hanging on our school fence (from wordless, to hard, to super hard, to Pluto and back hard – *so each child can be successful and see their next steps; as well as practicing during Free Play*)
 - assessed by teachers using B.C. Performance Standards
 - qualitatively reflected on by children and parents using an open-ended questionnaire
- Learning Stories (with a literacy focus) written twice a year by teachers with supporting observations by our Literacy Lead (December, March) to communicate learning and *how* learning is developing for each learner (see Learning Stories as a second goal below)
- Informal field notes (by the Principal) capturing children’s and adults’ attitudes about literacy throughout the year using an appreciative lens – *beginning with a September baseline – What’s going well for you with reading, writing, speaking, listening?* This documentation would be shared throughout the year as a provocation for staff/professional development, as well as shared with the PAC



- **B) Develop each teacher's capacity to deeply observe children; to understand and write Learning Stories in order to communicate learning/witness learning as it uniquely emerges from each child at Mill**

Bay Nature School - *because what we observe and document permeates how we relate to the children in our care - which will have major impacts on our expectations, our judgements, our lenses, our relationship to the whole child.*



(Learning Stories take us from categorizing learning as fragmented physical, intellectual, emotional and social skills to a view of learning as competency development and working theories that are nurtured in reciprocal and responsive relationships alongside families and communities.)

Actions/Embodiment (to support goal):

- Invite Anne Pelo (a teacher-educator, program consultant and author from Seattle whose primary work focuses on social justice, ecological and Reggio-inspired teaching and learning) to attend (through Zoom) several staff meetings (Fall and Winter) where she will offer insights and provocations to invite teachers to better develop a generous and curious gaze when observing children.
- Provide time for our Pedagogical Documentation Lead Teacher to write Learning Stories which will be hung on our fence at the front of the school to support/develop/sharpen the community's understanding of what learning looks like (beyond worksheets and tests), as well as open up time in her schedule to mentor interested teachers looking for feedback and encouragement
- Learning Stories become the Mill Bay Nature School's method for documenting and communicating student learning for parents (a minimum of three times a year). These align with the Hulq'umi'num' concept of witnessing.

Evidence of Learning (street & satellite data):

- The quality of Learning Stories develops over time in each teacher – moving from judgement (both positive and/or negative) and analysis (objectivity) – to observing, naming and honouring what each

child or group of children has done, said, learned and accomplished with a fresh, unbiased mindset as well as their curiosity and wonderings about what *this* may mean and what may provoke/nourish/cultivate future growth and development. (Criteria/framework to measure this is *in process*. To be completed by September 2021.)

- Teachers are invited to use the Learning Story Framework as a guide/reference for their observations/writing, and a self-assessment tool to better understand their strengths/needs
- At each staff meeting, we will look at a short video clip or a series of photographs (of a child/children deep in learning) and co-create a Learning Story with the Framework as a reference - guided by the Pedagogical Documentation Lead
- The Learning Stories will be qualitatively reflected on by children and parents using an interview structure – *What did you learn about yourself/your child through the Learning Story?*

II. Indigenous Ways of Knowing

The intentional creation of structures, rhythms, protocols in the *everyday* enacted culture of our school that amplify Hulq'umi'num' culture: speaking the Hulq'umi'num' language; drumming; singing; circle protocols; consensus building; privileging time/patience; Coast Salish artwork/design; practicing gratitude; witnessing; walking gently with ourselves, others, and upon Mother Earth; apprenticeship learning pedagogy; and holding our sacred children – 'Xe 'Xe Smune'em - in a generous gaze full of wonder – so that we will be a part of "backfilling the 150 years of oppression of the First Nations People in Canada" (T. George) taking seriously the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission



Actions/Embodiment (to support goal):

- Continue to nurture our relationship and Q'shintul – walk together - with our elders-in-residence Tousilum and Salsa'meethl George; knowledge keepers Louis Sylvester, Ernie

Rice, Sonya Sylvester, Laura Antoine, Marya Sylvester; language teacher Darla Smith; Hulq'umi'num artist Stuart Pagaduan

- Be willing to take feedback, change, support, stand beside, learn from and with our elders and knowledge keepers, as well as the Cowichan, Malahat, and Penalakut Nations *and beyond* – “*You have done a lot and have a lot to do*” (S. George)
- Hire a Decolonizing Lead Teacher to nurture/cultivate these relationships and deepen the teaching team/community's understanding of Hulq'umi'num' culture and history, as well as coordinating the Hulq'umi'num' language lessons for all the children (with Darla Smith as our consultant)
- Collectively inviting our Decolonizing Lead teacher to be the one to orient our attention to the hard work of decolonizing, and then weaving that understanding into the enacted life of the school
- Be open and welcoming to any people of Indigenous ancestry who choose to be a part of the Q'shintul community – families (no wait list), teachers, mentors, community members
- Offer Hulq'umi'num language classes for teachers, parents, community members each summer (so Hulq'umi'num may be heard in the air all through the day at MBNS)
- Offer Hulq'umi'num as the second language at Mill Bay Nature School (as French, like English, is a colonial language)
- Write a second grant to the Vancouver Foundation to continue the work of co-creating an embedded, land based Hul'q'umi'num' immersion middle school at Mill Bay Nature School

Evidence of Learning (street and satellite data):

- Witnessing Conversations with our elders-in-residence – *What is going well? Where do we need to grow next?* These would be documented *afterwards* respecting the Hulq'umi'num' structure of listening deeply with heart, mind, body, spirit during the dialogue
- Informal field notes (by the Principal) capturing children's and adults' knowledge and attitudes about our relationship with Hulq'umi'num' People – *culture and history* - throughout the year using an appreciative lens – *beginning with a September baseline* – *What are you learning – with your heart, your mind - about Hulq'umi'num People? Why is this important*

to you? This documentation would be shared throughout the year as a provocation for staff/professional development, as well as shared with the PAC and the children as a witness to our learning

- Learning Stories (with a Hulq'umi'num' focus) written once a year by teachers (April) to communicate respect for and understanding of Hulq'umi'num' history and/or culture (see Learning Stories as a Learning goal above)
- The Learning Stories will be qualitatively reflected on by elders and knowledge keepers using an interview structure – *What are you noticing about the children's hearts and minds as you hear these stories?*

III. Culture of Care

- Continuing to practice and deepen our understanding of the value/power of the Hulq'umi'num' way of decision making through consensus building – from the micro (teachers alone or children alone); to teachers, staff and children; to the macro (teachers, staff, children, and parent community/larger community) – to promote ever-more healthy relationships and partnerships through the development of generous and respectful spaces for diverse voices and perspectives.

Actions/Embodiment (to support goal):

- A movement across the school's routines, rhythms and structures from democratic decision making (voting/majority rules) to consensus building circles with specific roles assigned (a speaker, a chief, a matriarch) – in Clans, in Pods, Village Gatherings, Staff Meetings, PAC – *"The change in our staff meeting/meeting structures has been so game-changing for me because I know I won't be walking into a meeting dominated by a few voices."*

Evidence of Learning (street & satellite data):

- Informal field notes (by the Principal) capturing children's and adults' attitudes about consensus building throughout the year using an appreciative lens – *beginning with a September baseline – Why do you think Hulq'umi'num' people did not use voting as a way to make*

decisions? This documentation would be shared throughout the year as a provocation for staff/professional/PAC development, children's learning about decision making and fairness.

- The street data will be qualitatively reflected on by elders and knowledge keepers using an interview structure – *What are you noticing about the adult and children's hearts and minds as you hear these stories?*



Our story is beyond . . .

A story shared by a Elisha Blackburn – parent at Q'shintul - Mill Bay Nature School – which captures one child's unique challenges and our school's response to her:

Lucy is 8 years old. She has a wickedly sharp mind, so she's good at catching adults out in their hypocrisy. She's sassily cute, with white-blond hair in a pixie cut. She likes to wear collared shirts in a pseudo-Allen DeGeneres style. If you want to belt out songs from musicals, she's almost always up for it. But look at her side-ways at the wrong moment and you might trigger a rage-filled reaction.

Lucy has big feelings, a short fuse, and her stress response has a strong tendency towards fight, rather than freeze or flee. This can be a very tough combination in social settings, where other people easily and usually unintentionally trigger Lucy's big reactions. Dropping Lucy off at school in the morning can feel like a crazy thing to do, plunging her into a minefield of emotional challenges, with so many people and such high variability. Is it even reasonable to attempt meeting the educational needs of such a child in the complicated milieu of school expectations and constraints?

Last year, Lucy was not able to integrate into a classroom full-time. The school sought to meet her needs in a less overwhelming setting by having her work one on one with a dedicated support worker, slowly finding opportunities for her join in group learning as it was possible.

This year, Lucy was welcomed in the Lynx clan, where I watched her teacher, Myra, fall in love with her. When I would check in with Myra about how Lucy was doing, she used most of the conversation to gush about how much she loved my little girl. We'd also talk a little about strategies to support Lucy with some challenging behaviours, and we'd wonder how we could facilitate her engagement with literacy. But mostly, Myra would notice and celebrate whatever successes Lucy had experienced. I watched as Myra held with reverence the goal of empowering and guiding Lucy into a full expression of her beauty and intelligence. When she beamed about Lucy's growth, she reflected to Lucy and to me that Lucy is a sacred, treasured child, one of the Xe'xe' smun'eem.

Lucy has a bold, beautiful voice. Throughout this year, she was appointed to help lead the school community in the Q'shintul welcome song at morning circle twice a week, resonating the sounds, "Here we are, standing here, as one."

Lucy is learning to use her power. She is learning what it means to stand with others as one. She is learning what it feels like to be honoured and to honour others.

Lucy bounds out of the car on school mornings, happy to be in a place where she belongs, just as she is. I know she will be supported to learn and grow, and she will be held with love.

