

# Traditional teaching

*Students benefit from blend of modern curriculum and native culture*



*Russell Nahdee, coordinator of the University of Windsor's Turtle Island Aboriginal Education Centre beats a dewegan, a traditional First Nations drum, during a Heartbeat of Mother Earth lesson for a Grade 5 class at St. Peter Catholic Elementary school.*

(Windsor, Ontario, March 10, 2015) – Students like Tabitha Monaco are already expected to learn about the human heart and the importance of physical activity for maintaining good health by the time they finish Grade 5.

Thanks to a new pilot project, those students get the added benefit of learning about subjects like science, art, and math from a unique aboriginal perspective.

“I like learning how to say all the words in the aboriginal language,” Monaco said after a lesson called Heartbeat of Mother Earth, designed to teach students about cardiovascular health with the aid of some traditional aboriginal drumming and story-telling. “I like the activity and how they explained it.”

The WECDSB recently teamed up with the University of Windsor's Turtle Island Aboriginal Education Centre to launch a new pilot project that combines current curriculum with traditional culture and teachings.

The 4 Winds STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts & Mathematics) and Beginning Time Teaching Project is targeted towards students in Grades 5 and 6. It introduces both FNMI (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) students and non-FNMI students to STEAM areas while making strong connections to the FNMI lessons.

"They're taking traditional first nations teachings and incorporating them into subjects like science, technology, engineering, arts and math," said curriculum consultant Elaine Carr. "Turtle Island is developing indigenous lessons around those subjects."

Last week Turtle Island coordinator Russell Nahdee and Danielle Handsor, the centre's outreach coordinator visited Paul Vachon's Grade 5 class at St. Peter Catholic Elementary school in Tecumseh to deliver the Heartbeat of Mother Earth lesson.

Students were divided into groups to learn about their cardiovascular system and the effects of exercise on it. They made four lines extending outward from a circle to represent *Niiyaw* (my body), *Nbiipiizde* (my lungs) and *Ndeh* (for the left and right chambers of the heart).

"We want to be able to preserve the language," said Handsor. "If we don't practice the language, we will forget it."

While Nahdee beat a traditional drum to replicate the sound of a heartbeat, Handsor had each group doing a variety of exercises like jumping jacks or squats while passing around red and blue balls to represent the flow of oxygen and blood through the heart and lungs. They took their pulse before and after, and learned how to calculate their heart rate.

So in addition to learning some basic science and math, the students learned about Anishinaabe language, culture and their own connection to Mother Earth.

"There's a lot of knowledge that's part of First Nations teachings that's been lost," said Carr. "We believe there's a lot of value there and that we can learn so much from First Nations traditional teachings."

Carr said upcoming lessons may include sessions on traditional native trading and trapping routes and their connections to modern geography and urban planning. If successful, they hope to expand the program to other grades and subjects, she added.

**Watch a video of the students doing the activity:** [http://youtu.be/lq\\_uf0J4Das](http://youtu.be/lq_uf0J4Das)