

Native Culture Day a hit

at BCI

By Vicki White
Expositor Staff

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Students at the Brantford Collegiate Institute were skipping regular classes on Friday, in favor of those taught by the school's native students.

The gym was transformed into a living classroom for Native Culture Day, with demonstrations and displays of native art, music, cooking and community programs.

The most popular lesson was about lacrosse, with many non-native students trying out the sport for the first time.

"I loved the lacrosse game," said Grade 10 student Danette Woodhouse.

"I've never played before, and it's a lot different, and harder, when you're playing than when you're watching," she said with a laugh.

The program was organized and run entirely by the Native Club at the school, a group of about 40 students. The club was founded to help native students learn about their own traditions and to share this knowledge with other students.

"We really learn about ourselves," said Corey Hill, one of the organizers of the program. "But we need other people to know about us as well.

"This isn't fighting for (school) leadership or anything, it's to help us do things together...and to work together," said the Grade 12 student.

Lana Roswell is one of the few non-native members of the club. She says she got involved because she is fascinated by native culture.

"This whole thing is about learning about each other," said the Grade 13 student. "The native people have a great influence on us and we have a great influence on them."

Vice-principal Keith Tyndall said he was pleased with the day's activities. "The neat thing is that they organized it all themselves, all of it. It really makes you proud — and it makes them feel proud too.

"You really can't appreciate

someone else's culture until you live it" a little bit, he added.

Donna Marshall is the guidance counsellor for the Six Nations students at the high school. Her impressions echo those of the vice-principal.

"It helps the native student to feel pride in his own culture, and until he feels pride in who he is he can't be very successful. An activity like this really tells him he's okay."

Both staff members said it's important for staff and students to show their support for the native students.

The displays were divided into three sections. The first was the lacrosse game, where students and teachers made constant substitutions to keep the game running for hours.

There was also a traditional area, with drummers, artwork by students and professionals and jewelry. The third section was full of information about newer programs in the native community, including day care, policing, tourism, and employment programs.

Traditional food, cooked by native parents, song and dance were also included in the program.

Many of the participants were from the Six Nations community, including artists, business people and parents. They all thought the culture day was an excellent opportunity for the students to learn about each other and about native culture.