

2012-2013 AESN Inquiry Case Study



School Name: Hatzic Secondary School
District: #75 Mission
Inquiry Team Members: Lyn O'Grady, Karen Greaux

Question/Focus: Does using a novel with Aboriginal content allow the students to increase their knowledge of Aboriginal culture? Is appealing to the multiple intelligences model a starting entry point for all students to be engaged in learning? How do students express their learning in their writing and through the arts?

Scanning: What I noticed is that most students did not have knowledge about the Aboriginal culture, even if they are Aboriginal. How I learned this was through informal class discussion and also asking students to write down what they knew about Aboriginal culture.

Focus: My key area of learning was integrating the Aboriginal culture into the classroom on a daily basis through literature, and the arts (craft, storytelling, music). I actually managed to achieve this on most days with my Grade 8 students. My driving question was how could I integrate the culture and still teach the required curriculum. I am passionate about all students honouring and learning about the Aboriginal culture as they were the first peoples in Canada and many other countries. I also am a firm believer that daily discussions help promote cultural recognition and eradicate discrimination.

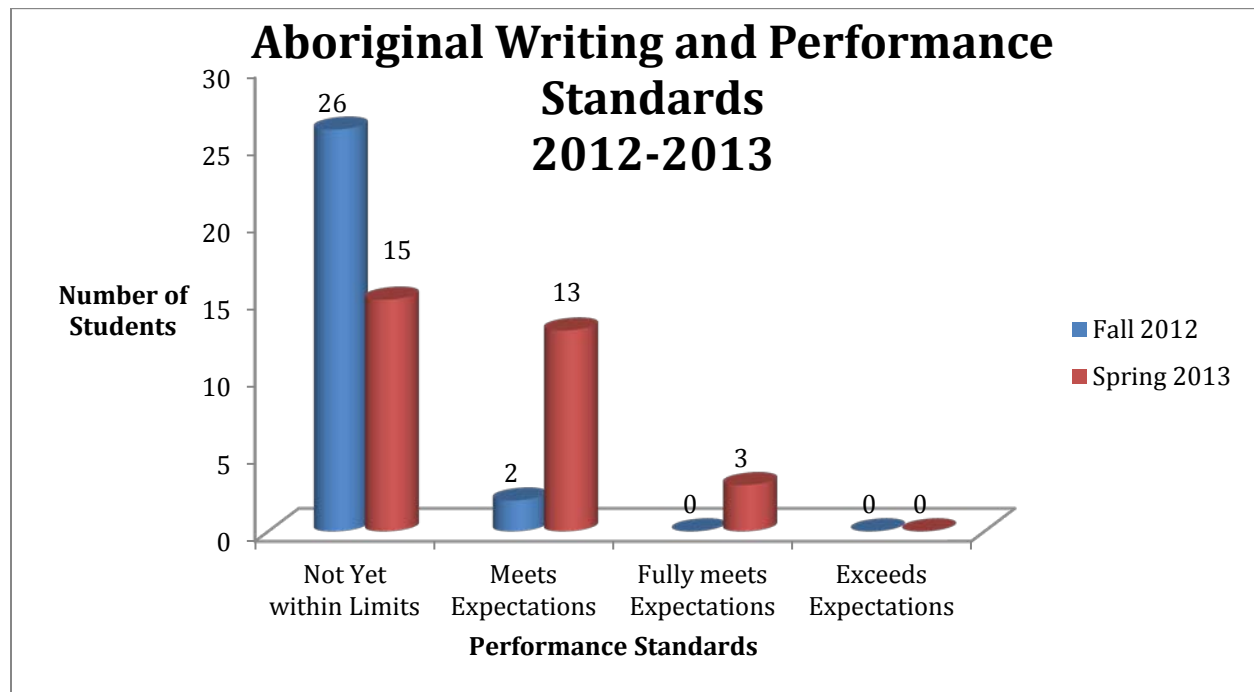
Hunch: I am passionate in learning and exploring the Aboriginal culture and I was hoping that my modeling and thirst for knowledge would entice my students to learn with and from me. Luckily my hunch was correct and the students were keen to learn and write about their findings from the Aboriginal presenters and myself.

New professional learning: This year all my learning was new as I had a huge leap in teaching assignments, from Kindergarten/Grade 1 to Grade 8. I explored using Aboriginal literature as novel studies, created a 'Celeb of the Month' (display board in our classroom, and another in the hallway for the entire school, describing an Aboriginal Canadian and their contribution to society) and asked students to write exit notes to inform me of their learning about Aboriginal culture each day. They then used these exit notes to write a 5 paragraph essay about their learning of the Aboriginal culture.

Taking action: Using the novels 'Ghost Canoe' and 'Touching Spirit Bear' proved very beneficial to the students. The novels kept them intrinsically motivated to read and learn about Aboriginal culture. I contacted the author of 'Ghost Canoe' and while Will Hobbs could not visit the school he did send a personally autographed poster for the class and personally autographed postcards for each student. They were thrilled with this connection to the author. I also purchased CD's for each novel to help the struggling readers and DVD's for each novel to provide a visual learning experience and an entry point for all learners. I used maps of the Tlingit tribe in 'Touching Spirit Bear' and the students researched and shared facts on the Tlingit tribe to increase knowledge and awareness of the culture. I invited Aboriginal presenters to discuss the culture and immerse the students in the culture through legends, weaving, creating Button Blankets, music and learning to play the game Slahal. One presenter was from the tribe discussed in 'Ghost Canoe' which proved invaluable as the students listened to her storytelling of her tribe which is located just

south of Vancouver in the United States. The students were able to make real life connections to their learning with this presenter.

Checking: My baseline evidence was gathered directly from the students-discussion and notes about the extent of their knowledge of the Aboriginal culture. Half the class knew about 'bannock' and that seemed to be all they knew about Aboriginal culture. As I view the 'Aboriginal Understandings Learning Progression' my students seem to have developed on the continuum from initially in the 'Awareness' to 'Developing and Acquiring'. This is evident from reading their exit slips from the beginning to end of year. The students have also progressed in their writing as I view the performance standards for Grade 8. The chart below indicates my findings from the fall 2012 to the spring 2013.



Reflections/Advice: This inquiry has taught me that taking risks is a messy business but extremely worthwhile. My students discussed and wrote about the wealth of knowledge they now have on Aboriginal culture as a direct result of me integrating it using novel studies, 'Celeb of the Month' wall chart, and including Aboriginal presenters. The students became intrinsically motivated towards their individual research. Next year I plan for my students to visit and peer tutor the Elementary students about their learning and new knowledge of the Aboriginal culture. This year has been a huge learning curve in that my teaching assignment changed from teaching Kindergarten to teaching mainly Grade 8. Reflecting on this my advice to other schools would be if you're passionate about promoting something and continuing on a learning path don't let the twists and turns of the path stop you. I was overwhelmed at the beginning of this year and wondered and worried how I could continue to integrate the Aboriginal culture on a daily basis. I 'looked to the mountain' (Gregory Cajete) and my passion, facilitation and intrinsic motivation carried my students and I along a fantastic learning journey.

EVERY learner crossing the stage with dignity, purpose and options.