

**ABORIGINAL ENHANCEMENT SCHOOLS NETWORK  
2011-2012**

**ASPEN ELEMENTARY & ARDEN ELEMENTARY  
Aboriginal Education Department  
#71 Comox Valley**

**Leadership Team**

Tanya Abbott, Colleen Devlin, Gail Martindale, Phebe May, Kathy Segriff, Lynn Swift

**Contacts**

Tanya.Abbott@sd71.bc.ca, Colleen.Devlin@sd71.bc.ca, Gail.Martindale@sd71.bc.ca,  
Phebe.May@sd71.bc.ca, Kathy.Segriff@sd71.bc.ca, Lynn.Swift@sd71.bc.ca

**School Context/Community Involvement**

The Comox Valley has a total population of just over 65,000 people. The population is diverse and the Aboriginal students (about 1,000) come from our local K'omoks First Nation band as well as a variety of Aboriginal cultures and mixed backgrounds. Students in School District #71 attend school at 15 Elementary Schools, 2 Middle Schools, 3 Secondary Schools, North Island Distant Education and a variety of Alternate programs. There are approximately 530 self identified students with Aboriginal ancestry in the Elementary schools in the District which represents about 10% of the total student population. We have 2 Aboriginal Support Teachers who work at the Elementary school level with classes from K-7 in 15 schools.

**School Inquiry and Action**

Our inquiry question was based on traditional oral storytelling. We felt it was important for student voices to be heard and we believe that everyone has a story worth telling.

“The truth about stories is that, that’s all we are.” Thomas King 2003

**School Question**

How will the use of student-friendly oral language lessons, inquiry, and formative assessment strategies increase the oral language skills of our students? How can we help children tell their stories?

**Focus of Inquiry**

Many students struggle with oral speaking. Others seem to intuitively improve. Trait-based, explicit instruction, combined with formative assessment practices, have the potential to engage passive learners and raise metacognitive awareness for our most capable learners. Our goal is to combine these elements to improve the quality of our students’ oral speaking skills, with modeling of oral traditions from community Aboriginal storytellers of the Inuit, Cree, Métis, and Anishinabe cultures.

**Links with District Enhancement Agreement**

We touched on 3 out of 4 enhancement goals,

- 1) To increase Aboriginal students sense of belonging; including sense of place, identity and self esteem, in a nurturing and inclusive environment
- 2) To improve the achievement of Aboriginal students
- 3) To increase the awareness in understanding of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit History, traditions and culture for all students.

A series of lessons over the year highlighted oral storytelling traditions. Specific literacy skills were taught to improve and highlight the importance and relevance of oral language. We honoured diverse ways of knowing and sharing knowledge.

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**Strategies**

Baseline Data: Students watched a teacher-demo lesson on telling a personal story using an artifact. Baseline Data was gathered by videotaping students telling their own stories based on an important artifact that they brought from home. Stories were rated using the Oral Language Rubric.

Brainstorm sessions were held in each class with the question “Why is telling stories important?” Responses were recorded on chart paper.

Lesson Sequence: A series of lessons were taught using explicit teaching methods, teacher modeling and gradual release of responsibility. Oral storytellers from a variety of different backgrounds told personal stories, re-told First Nations legends, and told legends from the local K’omoks First Nation.

Lessons included: Artifact lesson - a Memoir (Faye Brownlie, Tanny McGregor), using a graphic to ‘hold’ main events in story, Show Don’t Tell lesson (Ruth Culham, Carol Walters), Painting a picture in listeners mind-Adding Sensory Details using Smart Learning Coaching Cards (Susan Close), Listening to a good storyteller in action (Phil Umpherville, Michael Kusugak, Susanne Camp, Mavis Aubichon), Telling a personal story from a photograph.

Follow Up: Students were videotaped a second time in the spring after seeing good exemplars of Traditional Oral Storytelling, and after having explicit instruction on how to tell interesting stories with sensory details. Stories were then rated on the Oral Language Rubric.

The question “Why is telling stories important?” was asked again and responses were recorded and compared to first recordings on chart paper.

**School Findings**

34% Aboriginal students (7/24)

Grade 1 (total 24)	NY	A	M	E
Fall 2011	3	14	6	0
Spring 2012	1	4	16	3

20% Aboriginal Students (4/20)

Grade 2 (total 20)	NY	A	M	E
Fall 2011	11	7	2	0
Spring 2012	3	8	9	0

17% Aboriginal Students (5/27)

Grade 4/5 (total 27)	NY	A	M	E
Fall 2011	0	11	16	0
Spring 2012	0	6	16	4

**AESN Plans for 2012-2013**

- Team members will continue to work on improving students abilities to use oral language skills in a variety of different ways.
- Team members will book storytellers into classes again as the storytelling experiences were highly motivating to students and staff alike.

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- Storytelling lesson plans will be posted on the School District #71 Website.
- Creation of a poster with the traits of good oral language outlined (like “Key Qualities of the Writing Traits” by Carol Walters).
- Team members can use videotaped stories to revisit the oral language storytelling skills and to hear old favourites again and again.

**Reflections, Advice**

- Booking traditional oral storytellers in the classrooms grew into school wide experiences in one of the schools. Teachers and students were so engaged that the enthusiasm spread to other classes.
- Student engagement was extremely high, especially for students wanting to tell their story to the whole class with their photographs projected on the SmartBoard. Students were begging for their turn to tell their story.
- Videotaping the storytelling sessions enabled teachers to use the stories in other ways and to revisit favourite stories.
- Working together in a collaborative nature across the District allowed for collegial relationships to develop.
- Proper working equipment (video cameras and computers) and editing software would have made the project easier to manage.