

**ABORIGINAL ENHANCEMENT SCHOOLS NETWORK  
2010-2011**

**KILDALA ELEMENTARY  
#82 Coast Mountains  
Fourth Year in the Network**

**Leadership Team**

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**School Context/Community**

Kildala Elementary School is a dual track elementary school on the north Coast in Kitimat, B.C. Kildala Elementary has both an English program and a French Immersion program from Kindergarten to Grade 7. Our school population is about 25% First Nations ancestry. The English program makes up about one third of the school population (total population of approximately 220 students). The English population is about 15% identified students including autistic students, Down Syndrome students, severe learning disabled, moderately mentally challenged, visually impaired, and behavior designations. There is an additional 15% of the English program population that would be considered “struggling” students. Kildala School is home to Kitimat’s only StrongStart program and is a community school housing a nursery school and Child Development Centre drop in programs. We are also home to a before and after school care program. We have a child centered philosophy which is inclusive and welcoming.

**School Partnership**

We have been partnering with Dave Durrant at Mount Elizabeth Secondary School in Kitimat. Dave is teaching a First Peoples block and he is very interested in the First Nations oral tradition and how we can use this to help students in the classroom. We have been sharing our techniques and our findings with Mr. Durrant this year. We are hoping to form an active partnership next year where classes from both Kildala Elementary School and Dave’s program at MESS can work together.

**School Inquiry and Action**

**School Question**

By using culturally relevant stories, and by delivering the stories in ways that mirror cultural presentation practices, will First Nations students demonstrate higher levels of comprehension as indicated by the performance standards?

**Focus of the Inquiry**

Kildala School is a performance based school. This year we have a question that centers on using the traditional telling of stories as opposed to the reading of stories. We have an inquiry question that asks whether using the oral tradition will improve student comprehension.

**Historical Background:**

Oral tradition has been the means by which the First Nations culture and many other cultures, have survived throughout the years. Each time the traditional tales of the First Nations people are shared, the listeners learn something about the beliefs, values, culture and the ways of life practiced by the First Nations people. This is how cultural knowledge is passed on and shared with others. Myths were told to help explain the creation of plant and animals life, and to help explain natural phenomenon that otherwise could not be

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explained. Trickster tales were told to teach lessons and to entertain. Family drama tales and threshold tales were told to help the listeners learn about the way of the tribe and the First Nations way of life.

### **Link to First Nations Student Success**

First Nations student success is at the forefront of our mind. We need to find ways to engage and respond to these students. Using culturally relevant material, and teaching in ways that mirror the oral traditions is one way that we can work toward success for First Nations students.

### **Strategies**

- Prepare for the lesson by pre-reading the story and retaining the basic ideas
- Tell the story using the pictures to support the telling, but do not read from the text
- Tell the story in language the students will understand (most teachers will do this naturally)

Assessments:

We decided to use the materials from Drinovz and Lowe's Aboriginal Reading Assessment for our monthly assessment of students. We used the stories in the assessment tool for our periodic assessments, and a selection of the assessment worksheets. Our focus was on comprehension skills and so we selected the worksheets that had a focus on comprehension. In addition we added an interview sheet that was used during one-on-one interviews with the teacher.

Taking these daily assessments we evaluated comprehension skills on the performance standard. We only referred to the standards that reflected skills in the areas of comprehension.

### **School Findings**

We have been having some significantly positive results in our inquiry. We have been using the performance scale to rate the assessments and for tracking purposes. We are finding that students are more focused both during the telling of the story and during the reading of the story. Responses in the area of comprehension have shown improvement since the beginning of our study.

And more...

Some interesting observations so far are:

- Students are more focused during both the tellings and the readings of the story as evidenced by the noise level in the room, the eye contact with the reader or the book, and the level of question or observation (There were no random observations or questions.).
- The teacher speaks in a much quieter voice than would be normal for a teacher reading to a class. Her management tools are also very quiet including a waiting time, eye contact, and hand motions.
- The teacher during the telling tended to have more eye contact with the students.
- The teacher during the telling used more hand movement as visualization.
- The vocabulary chosen during the telling more closely matched the vocabulary of the students making it easier to understand the story. Stories often have vocabulary beyond the reader's or the listener's comprehension.
- The interview assessment was the best assessment and allowed for the clearest reflection of comprehension.

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As we near the completion of our inquiry we are convinced that the First Nations oral tradition of story telling has some real merits for students of both First Nations ancestry and for the general student population. We found the Aboriginal Reading Assessment a useful tool in doing assessments in the primary grades. All of the students in the class were able to identify with the Aboriginal stories and the Aboriginal themes. These themes seem to more closely match the northern lifestyle and traditions that are a part of the students' lives.

### **Reflections**

The oral tradition is a valuable tool when introducing students to literature, but it is also a useful tool in determining the comprehension level of the students. Student responses in the oral interview demonstrated a complexity of thought and connection not seen in their written responses. We see value in using the oral tradition in both our teaching to and in our assessment of students.

The way that stories are told is important. We found that volume and tone of voice were tools of engagement. Partnered with the tone and volume we found that using quiet hand signals for class management were more effective for learning.

### **School Plans for 2012-2013**

- Sharing of this study with teaching colleagues at the elementary level
- Partnering with the Mr. Durrant's secondary program and looking at how we can use our findings in the First People's class. Perhaps as a way to present to that class or alternately as a way to show the class another way to present a story.
- Introduce the Drinovz and Lowe Aboriginal Reading Assessment to the staff discussing how we used these tools and inviting them to do the same.