

**ABORIGINAL ENHANCEMENT SCHOOLS NETWORK
2011-2012**

**NALA'ATSI
#71 Comox Valley**

Leadership Team

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Contacts

Aboriginal Education staff in School District #71

Nin'ogad Elders

Wachiay Friendship Centre staff

K'omox First Nations

MIKI'SIW

School Context/Community Involvement

Nala'atsi is an alternate program for Aboriginal students in grades 10-12 in School District #71, Comox Valley. We are closely connected with the Aboriginal groups mentioned above, and meet with them on a regular basis. The mask project was a way to bring members from the Aboriginal community into the school to work on a project with the Nala'atsi students. The students were interested in both what was being taught during mask making and who was there that they could talk to and as a result attended school more often.

School Inquiry and Action

School Question

Will combining a mask making project with a Who Am I storytelling unit deepen the involvement of the Aboriginal participants and improve the Nala'atsi students' attendance?

Links with District Enhancement Agreement

Goal 2: To increase Aboriginal students' sense of belonging, including sense of place, identity and self-esteem, in a nurturing and inclusive environment.

Goal 3: To increase the awareness and understanding of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit history, traditions and culture for all students.

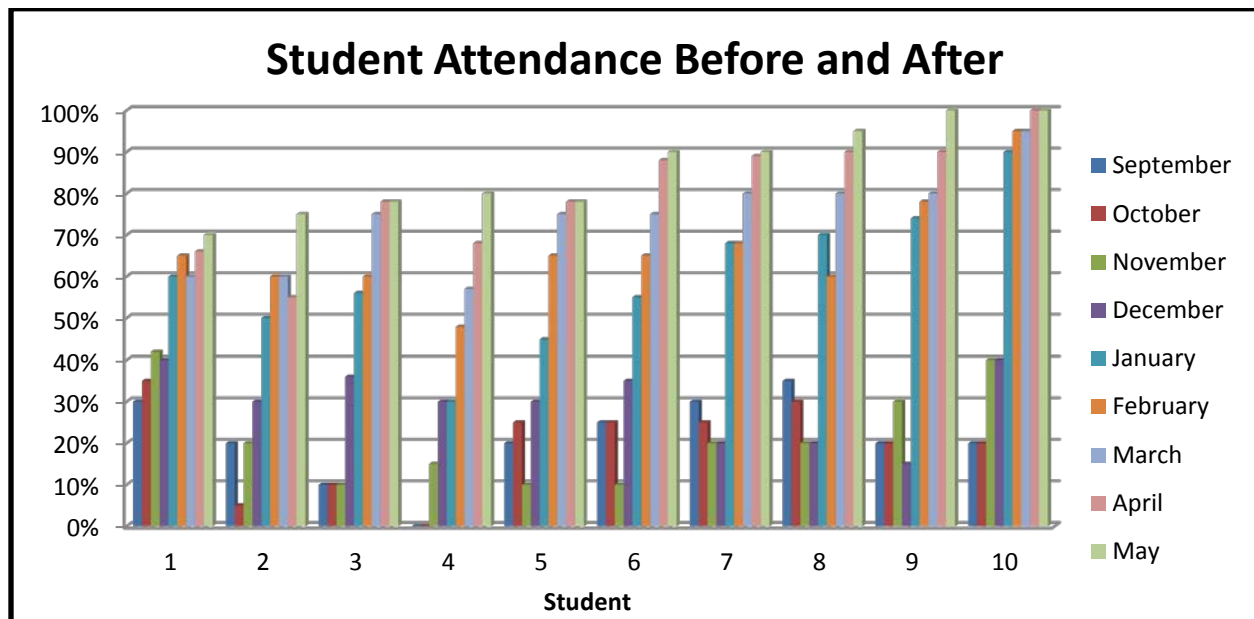
Strategies

The Nala'atsi students met with members from the Aboriginal community members usually once or twice a week. The students and members from the Aboriginal community worked on projects which promoted cultural awareness. Along with the sharing of knowledge, the students and community members developed a closer relationship.

Focus on Formative Assessment Learning Strategies

- Strategy 5: Put learners to work as **learning/teaching resources for each other**. This means that learners know strategies and have internalized quality criteria so that they can be productive with their same age and older and younger learning colleagues.
- Strategy 6: Do everything you can think of to make sure that **learners are the owners of their own learning**. This means that learners are genuinely engaged in learning and confident that they can learn and think about their own learning.

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AESN Plans for 2012-2013

This has been such an enjoyable project, that we have been asked if we would do it again next year by the participants and their friends/partners who did this with us this year. A number of middle and secondary teachers in the district have also expressed interest in doing something similar with our school and their classes and the board of the Head Start program has planned to do this project with their parents as an ice-breaker. Bringing participants from different generations together for this type of activity has strengthened the lines of communication between a number of very different groups. I have also been asked to present this to fellow teachers at one of our after school district workshops.

Reflections, Advice

As can be seen by the participants' comments below, this was a very positive activity. However, combining the artistic piece with the writing component did present some challenges.

- An adequate space is needed to store the bins of art materials. We had the use of a spare room where the mask materials could be stored.
- In addition to adequate space, while the masks are drying, they need to be somewhere that they are not going to be disturbed. In our spare room we have ample space to store the masks while they are drying.
- There needs to be a specific time period set aside to complete the masks and writing piece. I found that although the masks were completed on time, the writing piece took a little lot longer than I had planned.
- When you are dealing with participants who aren't in the school, it can be difficult to pin people down! Many of our participants lead very busy lives and it was often very challenging to get them to come in to finish their writing pieces!
- I would like to do this project again next year and offer it to even more people ...it was fantastic experience and the comments were powerful and profound.

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Comments from Participants after completing the Telling Stories through Masks Project

Nala'atsi Students' Comments:

- Lots of fun, I couldn't believe how good it looked in the end. Female 15years
- I really challenged myself this year, adding papier mache and objects from home. It looks cool hanging in the hallway! Male age 17
- I used a poem that I had written last year as inspiration. I loved doing this ...it was a little liketherapy! Female age 17
- I have this mask hanging on my living room wall. It is a part of who I am. Male age 18
- I wasn't at all interested in doing this until I saw how much fun everyone was having. I'm glad Toresa convinced me into doing a mask. I like how it turned out. Female age 16
- I enjoyed spending time talking to the Elders when we were doing the masks. They have some funny stories to tell and always seem to be interested...but not nosy...about what we are doing. Male age 18
- My girlfriend and I sat together while we did our masks; we got to talk through a lot of issues that had been holding us back. Our masks now hang together. Male age 16
- Again, like last year, I learned so much from this art project. I looked forward to Tuesdays when we would do our mask work. Female age 18
- I hope to do this again next year...I already know what I'm going to do. Male age 16
- The masks and writing pieces are on the walls of our school for everyone to see. The messages talk about the hard times many of us have had to face. Female age 17

Elder and Community Members' Comments:

- This is the second mask that I've made...last year I made one with my husband, and this year it is in memory of him. Female age 65
- Such a treat to come into the school. So many positive things going on and the kids are happy and on task. I wish that I had had a chance to have done my schooling at Nala'atsi. Community member age 45
- This is my 2nd mask...last year's mask was about my challenges.....this one is about my kids and their challenges. Let's do it again next year. Elder age 78
- The students here are so helpful. I cannot get over how they always take care of us. Elder age 77
- Toresa provided everything that we wanted and was sooo supportive. Love coming here....and I love how my mask turned out. Community member age 50
- Such a supportive and welcoming environment. What a treat to come into this building and see the children working together. Hope to do more projects with Toresa's class. Elder 70
- I have made masks for each of my grandchildren now; each mask represents the animal spirit who guides them. Elder age 79
- I got to think about something pleasant and positive when I was here at the school which is rare for me to do these days. Thank you Toresa for including me. Community member age 53
- Lots of fun...lots of good company...great place to hang out....Elder age 78
- I loved how my masks show how I am becoming more creative. Community member age 57