



## 2013-2014 AESN Case Study

**School:** Hatzic Middle/Secondary School    **District:** SD75 Mission

**Area of focus:** Student Level

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### **Question / focus area:**

- Making connections to Aboriginal knowledge and understandings
- Grade 8 students helping grade 3/4 students learn about the Aboriginal culture in a peer tutoring and caring environment

**Scanning:** During informal class discussion it seemed that many students were unaware of the many facets of Aboriginal culture, history and life. This year there were only three Aboriginal students in our grade 8 english/socials class and these students were quiet about their cultural heritage. Initially, they rarely contributed to our class discussion. What we noticed about the weekly interaction between our grade 8 students and grade 3/4 Hatzic Elementary students was that all learners were continuously engaged in high quality, well-organized co-operative learning based on Aboriginal literacy and the arts. All learners had a number of opportunities to express themselves and their learning using a variety of mediums that was totally focused on the Aboriginal culture.

**Focus:** Our key area of learning was using Aboriginal legends, students working in pairs to co-create their own Aboriginal legend, and the arts (drama, dioramas) to make connections to Aboriginal knowledge and understandings. Our grade 8 students were exposed to Aboriginal culture on a daily basis through reading a novel, discussing our Aboriginal/Canadian 'Celeb of the Month,' and many Aboriginal educator visits/teachings. The weekly interaction between our grade 8 and grade 3/4 class was composed of reading, discussing and becoming more aware of Aboriginal culture through graphic legends. We selected this area because there seemed to be a common interest for both classes (reading level suited the younger students and enabled the older students to be able to read and peer tutor successfully).

**Hunch:** We saw a need for students to have opportunities to 'make their learning visible,' to other students and adults, in schools and the community. We were also

hoping this inquiry would foster positive interactions and build community between both school and home in the Hatzic area. I feel this inquiry enabled students from both schools to build positive relationships with each other, begin to foster closer links between both schools, and motivate students to make their learning visible to the community.

**New professional learning:** This year we planned to focus on oral and written feedback from the elementary and middle school students to inform our practice. We are learning that our quest for knowledge involves patience and time. We are learning to take a step back and encourage and scaffold, rather than direct the students' learning. It was fantastic to brainstorm ideas, collaborate, plan, and to challenge the student's learning in a caring and stimulating environment.

**Taking action:** The strategies we had hoped to put into action went in a different direction than expected. We invited Aboriginal presenters to discuss Aboriginal culture and immerse the students in the culture through legends, weaving, creating Button Blankets, music and learning to play the game Slahal. We invited the District Halquemaylem teacher to our meetings to teach the students the names of animals in the Aboriginal legends. He also taught the students their names, a singing game, and Halquemeylem greeting. Our team planned to culminate the inquiry with a mini Potlatch at Hatzic secondary school. We invited elders, the District Aboriginal Principal, Administrators from both our schools, and parents. There were many positive comments from everyone at the potlatch about the student's displaying their learning about Aboriginal culture and the strong links this inquiry created between the two schools.

**Checking:** Our baseline evidence was gathered directly from the students (discussion and notes about their knowledge of Aboriginal culture). As we view the 'Aboriginal Understandings Learning Progression' our students seem to have developed on the continuum from *Awareness* to *Developing and Acquiring*. This is evident from reading their exit slips from the beginning to the end of year. The students have also progressed in their writing. The elementary students also showed growth as indicated by their initial statements about their knowledge of Aboriginal culture and their writing. We noticed improvement in students' creativity and co-writing skills.

**Reflections/Advice:** We highly recommend co-teaching as this was such a positive and effective strategy throughout our inquiry. It kept the students and teachers grounded, focused on our research, and intrinsically motivated. This inquiry created strong and positive links between the elementary and secondary school, fostered empathy between the students, and enhanced student's learning of Aboriginal culture. We are interested in continuing with this inquiry next year and are hoping that together with students we can integrate more Halquemeylem language in our speech and

writing. Our advice would be to encourage other classes to become engaged within this inquiry as the learning journey and benefits are immeasurable.