



## 2013-2014 AESN Case Study

**School:** Nakusp Secondary School      **District:** SD10 Arrow Lakes

**Area of focus:** Student Level

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**Question/focus area:** Will participation in a Heritage Fair, where students choose their own inquiry about their heritage, improve participation and student views on history?

**Scanning:** We are moving from the industrial education approach and towards a more differentiated and personalized education with 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning. We would like to see students take a more active role in their education. Student level inquiry opened doors, and lines of communication within families for these students and put them in charge of their own learning. Student investment and expectations for themselves increased. Many students did not have an understanding of their own heritage beforehand, and this inquiry helped facilitate an exploration of their own past.

**Focus:** Key areas of learner inquiry that we focused on included: enhancing every student's sense of belonging and culture, particularly Aboriginal and ethnic minority students. This was an opportunity to explore local and community heritage. Completing a heritage celebration project allowed students the flexibility to be as holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational as they wished. Students were empowered to find their sense of place and develop relationships between themselves, their families, and community members. The inquiries culminated in a heritage celebration open to all students and the community members, including: family, Elders, and archive, museum and library staffs. We worked alongside the local Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement Council and with our local Elders.

**Hunch:** Students are presented with a textbook on world and Canadian history. This textbook has not changed since 1998. We realized that personal connections to heritage and the past are not happening within the classroom. The text is too fragmented from personal experience. Students need to make personal connections to fully appreciate their place in the current world and who or what brought them into being. Using an inquiry approach brings students closer to history and facilitates its application to current events as well.

**New professional learning:** We learned about the cultural backgrounds and the indigenous history of the Arrow Lakes and our students. We also learned about hosting

heritage fairs in a way that honors and respects all cultural traditions. This was an opportunity to open up structured and safe discussion about cultural differences in the area including Aboriginal histories, the Doukhobors, Japanese Canadians, the construction of the Arrow Lakes Reservoir, and community dynamics/sustainability.

**Taking action:** Inquiries were based on student interest and actions. We supported students and assisted in the location of resources within and beyond the community. Students were scaffolded with high teacher support in the beginning with regards to narrowing their topic question, honing research skills and synthesizing information. Local Elders from Aboriginal and other cultural communities were available as resources for students, as well as public library personal and local museum staff.

Providing scheduled times in the museum and library worked out really well. Students used their time to examine methods of presenting information and accessing resources not available at the school. Students were given three weeks of class time to complete the project. All students learned the importance of planning and were able to make connections with their projects. Students were able to relate their topics to whatever interested them (e.g., mechanics, economics, hunting, science). The project was limitless and flexible. Whether they made new contacts within their family or discovered something new about a relative, all students learned more about themselves. Students exhibited great pride in their families and confidence in their connections and identity.

**Checking:** Surveys with this group of students did not accurately show reality. We did not end up using a social responsibility scale to measure learning. Instead we engaged students in conversations about their projects to gauge investment and learning and asked three reflective questions that each student was given at the beginning of the project:

- What did you learn?
- How can you apply this information or skills learned to your daily life?
- Why is this topic important in today's world?

Most students made powerful personal connections and were strongly engaged, it depended on how much they put into the project. Every student could tell visitors how they could connect their project to their lives. Students were leading conversations about their learning and they offered more information without prompting, and guests didn't need to come up with questions. Students discovered that is their responsibility to maintain knowledge of the past.

#### Student Quotes:

“We have to do fun some stuff sometimes.”

“I just can't believe that hunting goes back to 1978.”

“If this is learning and this is not learning, then this is through the roof.”

"I googled the cemetery where my grandfather was actually buried and actually got to see it!"

"We should be able to learn more about the past and understand how they created new things that ended up leading to something bigger."

"Hunting is an important part of my family. If I hadn't done this project I never would have learned about my Grandpa's hunt in Scotland."

"I am glad I took time to learn about this heritage in me. I am proud of my heritage."

"A lot more people now a days are trying to get more in touch with their ancestry. Because it is very cool experience when you can learn all about the life that your great great grandparents lived before you. Learning about your heritage can make a big impact on how you see the world, because you're more informed about how people lived it before you."

"The way I live my life, such as my rights, beliefs, and thoughts could be because my ancestors were raised in that way, therefore so was I."

These quotations clearly connect to the *First Peoples Principles of Learning*. Student inquiries enhanced connections to their families and communities, were reflective, explored generational roles, and facilitated exploration of identity.

**Reflections/Advice:** We plan to use student-led inquiries in all our classes. We learned the value of presenting student work and how it heightens students' personal expectations and engagement. Families tend to be more involved during the elementary years and the opportunities for involvement decrease as students get older. It is important to involve families in high-school education. The Heritage Fair came together very easily and it is an event that our school can see holding every few years. Involving other classes and grades increased interest levels and facilitated multi-aged conversations.