



2013-2014 AESN Case Study

Schools: Stawamus Elementary, École Squamish Elementary, Mamquam Elementary

District: SD48 Sea to Sky School

Area of focus: Transitions

Inquiry Team Members: Heidi Kubin, Tina Sherlock

Question / focus area: Would a user-friendly, oral language assessment guide encourage teachers to put more emphasis on explicitly teaching and assessing oral language in the early intermediate years, in the effort to create a more equitable system for our Aboriginal learners?

Scanning: During the scanning process, we noticed that while the primary grades are quite skilled at formally assessing oral language, intermediate grades often place more emphasis on reading and writing assessment. The primary grades are required to report on Oral Language, which is not the case in intermediate. We wanted to devise some strategies to keep the oral language momentum from the primary years continuing into the intermediate years, in the effort to support the disproportionate number of Aboriginal students who are leaving grade 3 with emerging oral language skills.

Focus: We attended a workshop in June 2013 where one of our formal leaders announced that, according to SD48 report card data, less than 30% of our Aboriginal students are meeting or exceeding expectations in “Oral Language: Speaking and Listening” by the end of grade three. As intermediate teachers, we wondered how we could change that statistic in their transition from primary to intermediate.

Hunch: Our hunch is that the focus on reading and writing in the intermediate years often takes priority over oral language instruction and assessment. Because there is no requirement to formally report on oral language in the intermediate years, the instructional emphasis seems to be on reading and writing. We figured if we created an oral language *quick scale* (an easy assessment guide that teachers and students can use as a snapshot for formative assessment), there might be more movement towards purposefully integrating oral language enhancement strategies in the classroom, which, in effect, would create more opportunities for success for our aboriginal learners.

New professional learning: Our speech-language pathologist is an amazing resource. She was able to direct us to a plethora of oral language assessment scales that the speech language pathologists of SD48 already created and use for the primary years.

Unfortunately, they stop at grade 3 so it reinforces that we still need to grow with oral language assessment in the intermediate years.

Taking action: We created a grade 4/5 oral language “quick scale” assessment guide based on the prescribed learning outcomes of the Ministry of Education’s language arts integrated resource package. We tested out the assessment guide by having the class work in groups to film themselves re-tell a First Nations legend using puppets. They were also required to film a response to the legend in a conversation format. The students used the Oral Language assessment guide as the criteria and peer/self-assessed during the sharing session. The students were able to accurately assess themselves and each other using the guide, and were keen to make adjustments to their work in the effort to improve their oral language skills.

Checking: Before we embarked on the filmed puppetry project we used the assessment guide to assess each student based on observation. We were planning to compare this with the peer and self-assessments after the project to assess growth and plan next steps. We are pleased with the oral language assessment guides we created, as they are user-friendly for both students and teachers. At the very least, our inquiry has heightened teacher awareness about explicitly teaching/assessing oral language in the intermediate classroom.

Reflections/Advice: We learned that as intermediate teachers, we need to honour oral language as much as we honour reading and writing, as all three literacy components are crucial for the success of each child. We discovered that there is a high school team in Pemberton who is likewise exploring assessment of oral language. Our hope is to connect with all levels and create an oral language continuum. We would also like to see Oral Language have its rightful spot on our SD48 report cards.