



2013-2014 AESN Case Study

School: Ecole Mission Central Elementary **District:** SD75 Mission

Area of focus: Transitions

Inquiry Team Members: Susan Curror, Donna Giroux, Karen Greaux, Jean Greenshields, Peter Lindley

Question/focus area: Language development - Halqemelylem language program in the early primary grades

Scanning: The students enjoyed the experience, especially the singing of traditional songs. Of significance to the team, all students were engaged in the activity and Aboriginal students especially were animated and focused. All students looked forward to having Peter and Donna come in to their classroom and there was a positive energy amongst the students. Following the lesson, some students shared with the class that they were Aboriginal which is significant because they had not done so previously.

Focus: Recognizing that language and culture are intertwined, our main focus was to develop cultural awareness and pride through a Halqemelylem language program. A continued goal of our Aboriginal Advisory Committee for Siwal Siwes is to develop a language program in Mission public schools. Two years ago, Ecole Mission Central Elementary began a Halqemelylem language program at the Kindergarten level. This year, the district was able to hire two district language and cultural workers to develop the program at several schools and to build on what was established in the past. We were able to offer Halqemelylem language sessions to kindergarten to grade 2 students twice per week for 30 minutes each time.

Hunch: Our school is a dual track English and French Immersion school with a significant percentage of aboriginal students. Staff have observed that students appear to be divided along these lines. It is important for us to find areas where we can learn from one another and break down cultural barriers. Presenting cultural activities in a fun and engaging way and spending time following the activity to discuss and debrief is one way to work toward common understandings.

New professional learning: We purchased several copies of an inquiry resource to share with staff. This year we got familiar with inquiry strategies as we began to embed the process across our district in ways such as applying for grants from Siwal Siwes Aboriginal Department.

Taking action: Observations both in the classroom and on the playground have demonstrated that the students tend to create their own homogenous groups and do not mix with others (English, French, Aboriginal). For the past few years, staff have worked to break down these barriers with different activities such as French cultural events. We wanted an ongoing program, not a “one off”, that all students would enjoy and Aboriginal students especially would connect with to develop cultural pride.

Checking: Language and Cultural workers were not hired until later in the year so we were unable to begin the program as early as we would have liked. Building on the program to include grade 1 and 2 students has created consistency, which will be continued this year. 99% of Aboriginal students (kindergarten to grade 6) in our school report on a survey that they are proud to be First Nations, Metis or Inuit.

Reflections/Advice: We learned that all students enjoyed the Halqemelyem Language program as delivered by Peter and Donna. We wondered if only the Aboriginal students would be engaged but we found that the all kindergarten to grade 2 students benefitted from participating in the program. We will be expanding the Language Program to include grade 3 students in the 2014-15 school year and continue to build until all grades are receiving this cultural teaching. Our advice to other schools would be to start small. It is difficult to find staff who are able to teach a traditional language program. Bringing in elders may be a good way to start.