



## 2014-2015 AESN Case Study

**School:** Hatzic Middle Secondary School    **District:** #75 Mission

**Area of Focus:** Enhancement Agreement

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**Our focus for this year:** Does using a novel with Aboriginal content allow the students to increase their knowledge of the Aboriginal culture? How do the students express their learning in their writing and through the arts?

**Scanning:** When discussing and reviewing the student responses to 'what knowledge they had of the Aboriginal culture' I was looking at the following First People's Principles of Learning:

- Learning recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge – started me thinking about how I could continue to extend the integration within my classroom on a daily basis
- Learning is embedded in memory, history and story – started me thinking about the need for Aboriginal educators in my classroom. Also, to extend the aboriginal literacy resources in my room.
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational – started my thinking about how to make students aware of the importance of place and of making connections with the Aboriginal culture their local area and within their academics.

These principles guided my learning and role as facilitator with and for my students.

**Focus:** I selected legends as it tied in with the various genres I was working on with the students. We were reading Aboriginal novels/stories and I wanted the students to have exposure to learning the Halq'emeylem language so they learned a deeper understanding for the Aboriginal culture. I also wanted the students to not only learn the language but present and share their newly acquired language skills.

Although my focus became my Grade 8 students I was working at immersing students in the culture. I worked with an Aboriginal artist and Aboriginal students in the school as they co-created artwork, templates and painted these in our school courtyard.

**Hunch:** I viewed practices at my school and decided there was a need for change due to:

- A need to educate the students about the Aboriginal culture and how this can enhance their local knowledge and understandings

- The Halq'emeylem teacher was not visiting our school and this, in my mind, was a catalyst for definite change. He was not visiting as he was not invited. He was only visiting the elementary schools in our district and I felt secondary students also needed this opportunity.
- I have invited various Aboriginal educators to my class for a number of years but I felt the need to bring it all together in some way. I needed to find ways to share all the learnings the students and myself gained from them and to celebrate our skills and learning with them and others.

**New professional learning:** The new areas of professional learning I explored included:

- Reading a variety of legends written for elementary and middle school students. My students were all at various reading levels and this enabled and encouraged them to participate at their own developmental level.
- Inviting Aboriginal liaisons into the classroom to discuss various legends from the local area, as place is important in Aboriginal culture. As the legends were local, students were able to make stronger connections and identify on a deeper level with the Aboriginal culture.
- Working with a Halq'emeylem teacher and inviting him to my classroom on a regular basis to teach the students the Sto:lo language. I found myself speaking more Halq'emeylem during each day with the students. I continue to learn the language and increase using it on a daily basis in my classroom and within the school.

**Taking action:** I decided to incorporate the following strategies into my practice:

- Immerse the students in a wide variety of Aboriginal Canadian legends for various reading skill level.
- Compliment the legends with guest speakers – Aboriginal liaisons- to discuss the legends of our local area. This was such a powerful teaching moment as the students hung on their every word. A great cultural morning!!
- In depth discussions about information pertaining to legends. We focused on content, meaning, creating a visual effect through oral stories, reasons why legends are passed on from generation to generation, who passes the legends to others and why.
- I invited the students to co-create a legend in a group situation. They worked at co-writing, co-reflecting and co-problem solving as they created a legend that was meaningful to them. They also needed to create a legend that had meaning for the audience who listened to their presentation.
- I asked the students to use both Halq'emeylem and English when writing and co-creating their legends. When they were finished I suggested they re-visit reading the legends and underline words they could change from English to Halq'e meylem . The students were then invited to read the Halq'emeylem and English as they presented their legends and work to the people attending the 'potlatch'.
- After the writing was completed I asked the students "How can you show your learning to others?" They found this difficult at first and I sat and gave them time to think. It was interesting to listen as each group contributed their opinions, decisions were made and

ideas began to emerge and form. Each group decided on various ways to 'make their learning visible'. The students created dioramas, sequential pictures, Aboriginal masks which they wore, and painted back drops to create the atmosphere, and used props to provide meaning.

- I organized a 'potlatch' in my school and invited Aboriginal elders, District Aboriginal principal, Aboriginal liaisons, and our Principal to attend. I wanted to invite the other three Grade 8 classes but the students were not keen for that to happen, so it didn't. The students and I discussed the meaning of potlatch, why it is important and what happens at this celebration ceremony. The students created the 'giveaways' and absolutely enjoyed the bannock!

**Checking:** The differences I feel and witnessed made include:

- Student's ability to remember and retell legends of the local area. It was inspiring to hear Grade 8 students constantly referring to the local legends.
- Student's ability to learn about, practice and speak the Halq'emeylem language. They were remarkable with their pronunciation and use of the Sto:lo language.
- The skills the students displayed in 'making their learning visible' when I acted as facilitator rather than teacher driven ideas.
- The baseline I used was asking the students to write jot notes on what they knew about the Aboriginal culture, what they would like to learn and in what ways they would like to learn. This gave me direct insight and an authentic baseline where I could possibly start with my inquiry. The end of year essay in my class was 'What have I learned about the Aboriginal culture this year'. The students wrote about challenges, discoveries, highlights and successes they gained from their learning. Many included they were surprised by the depth of their new knowledge and hoped they would continue learning about the Aboriginal culture next year.

**Reflections/Advice:** This inquiry has opened my eyes and mind to the connections, appreciation and genuine interest of Grade 8 students towards learning about and extending their knowledge of the Aboriginal culture. Next year I would like to extend on my inquiry, from this year, and begin the students learning Halq'emeylem earlier in the year and using it in various genres in their literacy. Also, I would like to extend this year's learning to incorporate songs using only Halq'emeylem (no English) so the students become fluent and confident with the language. In addition, I would like to invite Aboriginal elders and story tellers to share their knowledge with my students so their knowledge of the local area is enhanced. Embedding the importance of place could help the students make strong/stronger connections with their background knowledge of where they live. This year was a late start due to the strike. I would advise other schools to start early in the year and provide as much interaction with elders and Aboriginal language teachers so they can learn and use the language in songs, writing and incorporate it into all areas of learning.