



2014-2015 AESN Case Study

School: Lillooet Secondary **District:** #74 Gold Trail

Area of Focus: Enhancement Agreement

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Our focus for this year: Will honorary grad stoles that represent pride in identity, traditional values and educational accomplishment heighten awareness and respect for tradition, education and indigenous culture among our students, staff and community?

Scanning: In Lillooet it has become a tradition over that past few years to have a separate Aboriginal graduation celebration. This gave rise to the concern that the success of our Aboriginal students needed to be acknowledged and celebrated within our school and shared with the entire community. This need to demonstrate pride in oneself; who they are, where they come from and what they have achieved was a silent desire for many of our students. With this in mind and a review of our recent Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement, we chose to concentrate on the following strategies:

- Celebrate and share success in learning.
- Continue to build cultural connections between homes and schools.
- Include a visual awareness of, and respect for, Indigenous community values within school publications and guidelines, and display them throughout the school.

To this end we wanted to concentrate on one of our most important events, that being graduation. In small communities such as ours, the graduation ceremonies are regarded as a highlight for our students and are thus shared by the whole community. It is quite common to have people attend who do not have a relative who is graduating but they attend nevertheless to celebrate the success of all students. In many instances it is the first time for past students to re-enter the school having been away for many years.

The First Peoples Principles of Learning remind us that: Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits and the ancestors; Learning is holistic, reflective, experimental, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place); Learning recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge; Learning is embedded in memory, history and story and learning requires exploration of one's identity. At graduation we recognize and pay respect to the territory of the Stl'at'imx people. Our Stl'at'imx students, their history, their memories, their accomplishments and their learning required the same acknowledgement at this momentous celebration.

Focus: Celebrating and sharing our student's success in learning (along with honoring and respecting the traditional indigenous culture and language) is the main focus. Honorary graduation stoles that represent a sense of pride in identity, traditional values and educational accomplishment were designed, created and worn by chosen graduates from each of our Aboriginal communities during the convocation.

Hunch: Many adults have expressed the need to increase the significance of indigenous culture in the eyes of all students and increase the importance of their sense of self worth within our school and as they move forward in life. At this time our school has a culture committee that is working to encourage and reinforce a sense of belonging for all students. Concern is expressed on a regular basis that respect for culture, tradition and Aboriginal student success is lacking and needs to be addressed. To celebrate student success and connect it to pride in identity, family, community, traditional values, language and culture would undoubtedly inspire self-confidence in our learners, both past and present.

New professional learning: Staff and students learned more about each other and grew to respect the diverse cultures and traditions of the students within our school as the stoles were being created. The artists, their community and the stoles were shared and celebrated at our Aboriginal Day celebration. Our students, staff and community members became aware that the stoles would become a tradition in our school that would honour students' hard work and celebrate success and cultural pride.

Taking action: Assisted by an Aboriginal Education Worker from our school, each band chose a stole artist, some past students and some elders. The designs were to reflect strong values and pride in their land and culture. Their creations were to share traditional skills and knowledge from past generations with an emphasis on communication and respect. After completion, the artists were acknowledged for their work both on Aboriginal Day and at the graduation ceremonies. In June, a committee including the School Principal, Graduation Sponsor, Councilor, Aboriginal Support Worker and Principal of Aboriginal Education chose a graduate from each community to wear their stole in honour of their continued sense of pride in identity and traditional values and educational accomplishment.

In addition, our non-indigenous students were offered and encouraged to create a stole in honour of their culture and traditions. The final goal was to have our students stand at graduation as one, with pride and purpose representing success in our multi-cultural community. After an introductory speech describing the inquiry project, our students did stand together wearing the stoles and began a new tradition for the graduates of Lillooet Secondary School. Now the nine stoles are displayed in a glass case in the school's entrance and will be a daily reminder of the importance of strong values and pride in the land and culture that surrounds us.

Checking: The honorary students stood with pride and wore the stoles throughout the entire ceremonies, for every photo and as they accepted their diplomas, bursaries and scholarships. Many community members shared positive and supportive comments and compliments

regarding the project and its importance for the school and our community. Our language teacher retired and shared her sense of pride knowing the stole she created would be her legacy to the school and connect the past, present and future graduates and their accomplishments as Stl'atl'imx students. Undeniably, the focus on culture and identity as an important part of our student's learning was woven throughout the celebration due to the stole presentation.

The display and promotion of the honorary stoles should continue to heighten awareness of our indigenous culture in the next school year. It will take time to evaluate the difference we are making as the stoles become recognized year to year as an honour and privilege handed down. It will be evident that growth has occurred as more and more students will want to design stoles or start to wear the ones passed down from siblings or even parents if this new tradition is upheld. Only two multi cultural stoles were completed for the 2015 ceremonies. It is hopeful that this number will increase in the following year.

Reflections/Advice: Graduation is one of the most important celebrations for our school and community each year. Creating an awareness of the importance of culture and tradition and their relationship to learning and success of our students during this celebration was extremely powerful. I would recommend this project to all schools that wish to enhance and celebrate success of learners both indigenous and non-indigenous. Promotion of the project will start at the first grad meeting in September and will be continually shared at assemblies throughout the year. Hopefully past honorary graduates will speak at the meetings sharing their feelings of pride as they were chosen and their experience of wearing the stoles at graduation. Exemplars from this year will be shared as inspiration to next year's graduates who may wish to create a traditional memory stole. Finally, Chiefs and education coordinators will be contacted in hopes that they will find a way to display a photo or write up of their honorary graduate and become a part of the school tradition only to further the connection with community.

