

2014-2015 NOII Inquiry Case Study



School: New Hazelton Elementary **District:** #82 Coast Mountains

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Scanning: We have noticed that in our school most students are somewhat engaged in Gitksan Language classes but only a few seem to be really enthusiastic about the learning.

At intermediate grade levels, instructional activities have included oral language exchanges which the students often engage in with some reticence. Students are more willing to complete pencil and paper tasks. This work involved less risk for learners since they could take their time to find the correct word and use print cues from around the room to help, but it did not challenge the students.

It has been particularly hard to get the grades six and seven students to be focused and engaged. Grades six and seven students were not retaining a lot of what they had covered in previous years. We felt that they, in particular, needed a change and something different to lure them into the learning.

Focus: Our focus was to get grades six and seven students more motivated by working in small groups and taking part in competitive challenges.

Hunch: Presenting the Gitksan language material to the grades six and seven students in the same way that they had seen it in past years must have been boring and not interesting for them. We hoped that games would get them out of their seats and that the activities would stimulate them. We believed that having the students meet challenges as a group would be a more culturally appropriate approach to learning. We had a hunch that if they needed to learn more Gitksan words to help their teams win a challenge that they would try harder to learn more Gitksan words.

New professional learning: We learned a whole new way to teach a second language.

Taking action: From previous experience we knew that English as a Second Language teachers used a lot of games to keep learners engaged. We decided to study what they were doing and select some activities that seemed culturally appropriate and worked with our instructional goals. These are what we tried.

Maluu

This game is a lot like Balderdash. It works well for introducing new vocabulary.

Divide class into small groups of 2 or 3. Identify each team with a number.

Give each group as many blank cards as there will be vocabulary words in the lesson.

Teacher tells the class one of the new words. Each team writes a definition of that word on their card with their team number in the corner of the card. The teacher writes the correct definition on a card.

Students are required to work as a team to come up with the definition.

The teacher collects all the cards and mixes them up.

The teacher reads out the definitions one after the other, each time saying the new word, ie, "Ama sa means..." so that students get to hear the words a lot. When they have all been read, each team gets to vote for which one they believe to be the correct definition.

Teacher chooses a student to read out the correct definition.

Students are expected to work as a team to choose which definition to vote for.

A team gets one point for every vote for their definition.

A team gets one point if they vote for the teacher's correct definition.

The teacher gets a point if no one votes for the correct definition.

Variations

-Have students read out the definitions

-consider telling the students the general context of the new vocabulary, or not

Language Auction

This is a game that we used at the beginning of a new unit when students were not familiar with the words.

Divide the students into teams of 4 or 5.

Assign one student the job of banker.

Each team receives a set amount of play money.

The teacher says a Gitxsanimaax word paired with an English translation. Students are expected to work as a team to decide what to bid on and how much. The teams bid for this word pair and the teacher sells to the highest bidder.

The teacher tells whether or not the translation was correct.

IF the translation is correct, the purchasing team wins the amount which they bought it for. IF it is incorrect, the team loses the amount which they bought it for.

IF a translation is correct and NO ONE bids on it, ALL TEAMS must pay a fine.

The team with the most money wins.

Modifications:

-To build in some expressive language practice, have students rotate reading out the word pairs.

-This game works well at a one word level. To use it for sentences or more complex work, give the teams work sheets with the correct and incorrect sentences printed out to study before the game begins.

-If students have covered numbers have them bid in Gitxsanimaax.

-If a team purchases a word or sentence that is incorrect, give them a chance to say the correct version to redeem their loss.

When playing Maluu and Language Auction we encouraged the students to listen for root words in the new words that might help them to figure out what the words mean.

Board Slap

This is a game to review vocabulary in the middle of a unit.

Stick cards with the English translation to the white board.

Divide the class into two teams. The teams line up one behind another, with the first person facing the board, about 1.5 meters or so away from the board.

Teacher says the Gitxsanimaax version of a word.

The first person on each team has a chance to run to the board and slap the English word.

Team members are encouraged to help the first person.

The team that slaps the correct word wins a point.

First person from each team goes to the back of the line and the second person stands ready to play.

Repeat until every student has had at least one turn.

The team with the most points at the end of play wins the game.

(watch the lines to make sure that everyone is moving forward and taking a turn)

This game was very popular and high energy. It is also very easy to prepare for.

Gitxsanimaax X and O

This is a game to review vocabulary in the middle of a unit.

Preparation:

Create a tic tac toe grid on the white board. In the corner of each square print a number from one to nine.

Before class, prepare a teacher question sheet with one question for each of the nine squares.

If the class is small, divide the class into two groups, X and O. If the class is very large, divide students into groups of 4 or 5 and have teams play off against each other.

X goes first and indicates which square they wish to attempt. The teacher says the English word for that square. The X team has 30 seconds to say the Gitxsanimaax translation of the word.

Students are required to work in their team. If they are successful, the teacher marks an X in the square. If they are not successful, play goes to the O team who then can indicate which square they wish to attempt.

The first team to line up three of their symbols in a straight line wins the game.

Bingo

We often used this game to review vocabulary at the end of a unit.

Write the English versions of all the words and phrases in the unit on the white board. Write the Gitxsan version of the words on slips of paper and place them in a container.

Give each student a piece of blank paper and eight small squares of coloured paper. Instruct the students to fold the paper into eight sections and write one of the vocabulary words or phrases into each section. When the students are ready, the lead student selects slips of paper from the container and reads out the Gitxsan words one at a time until a student has a full card and calls out BINGO.

Dress up

This game was specific to a unit where we covered clothing names. We put a lot of different cloths in a big pile. Students were divided into teams of 4. One person on each team was the 'model'. The teacher called out articles of clothing in Gitksan. The three other team members took turns finding the named article in the pile and then dressing the 'model'. This game was fun and goofy and really made the kids pay attention.

Draw your teacher

This game is specific to body part vocabulary. The teacher says the body part in Gitksan and students take turns drawing it on a shape of the 'Teacher' on the white board. They can make it look as wacky as they want as long as they get the right body part. If they draw ears instead of eyes the teacher erases what they drew.

Checking: We were absolutely satisfied with the results of this change in our teaching styles. We found that student language use increased when we used the games. Students visibly gained confidence in expressive tasks, they were much less shy and uncertain. By June the students were hurrying to class and eagerly asking what we were doing that day. They made special requests for games. Participation between students increased. By June, students consistently encouraged and helped one another. The games created a strong bonded feeling in the class.

Reflections/Advice: We learned a lot more about teaching a second language from our study of the field of Teaching English as a Second Language. We feel that these skills will be useful whatever we teach in the future. This has changed our teaching styles forever. We will continue to search for new games all the time.

We recognized that engaging in active, fun but educational games with grades six and seven students is a good bonding experience between the students and with the teachers.

We did a half day workshop to share our intervention with other teachers. This was very well received.