



## 2014-2015 AESN Case Study

**School:** Lord Tweedsmuir Secondary    **District:** #36, Surrey

**Area of Focus:** Student Level

**Inquiry Team Members:** Darrell Ferrill, Sergio Solari, Penny Turpin

**Question/Focus:** What will it take to achieve Reconciliation for First Peoples and the government?

**Scanning:** Currently, students in the school have little historical or contextual knowledge of the complexity of Aboriginal history, issues or cultures. They have understanding of Aboriginal popular culture via art, artifacts, and some terminology. There is some Aboriginal content taught in Social Studies, English and Humanities courses.

**Focus:** Students created the focal question for our Inquiry: What will it take to achieve Reconciliation for First Peoples and the government? This matters because the question originated with the students; it's what mattered to them most. This matters because it is timely and critical given the Canadian context of the disparity between the quality of life for First Peoples and non-Aboriginal citizens, the diverse opinions on First Peoples issues, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission reaching its final conclusions.

**Hunch:** Students see the need to deepen understanding of Aboriginal history, cultures and issues. They want to strengthen their appreciation of, and empathy for, Aboriginal Peoples. We are contributing to this by integrating First Peoples content into curricular areas whenever possible and by providing English First Peoples 10-12 as curricular options.

**New professional learning:** Our new professional learning centered on cross-age teaming and student inquiry. The new areas of learning included trying a dual grade approach, using journals as vehicles of exchange between the two classes and having students develop their own inquiry question. The design of coming up with a student-led inquiry involved students generating possible inquiry questions and through three stages of voting, finally culminating in a single transferrable vote method to achieve higher satisfaction, chose a single question to investigate. Inquiry Journals were used where Grade 10 and 12 EFP students posed questions, responded, investigated topics, connected to EFP content and included visual elements to represent their content. The journals were swapped between the classes and the same process was followed with each class.

**Taking action:** The inquiry was designed to take place between a Social Studies 10 class and an English First Peoples 10 class. At semester turn-around, Sergio's courses were changed and we had to shift to the inquiry being an exchange between a Grade 12 EFP class and a Grade 10 one. The change worked well in that the students likely responded better to students in a different grade than to peers. Both classes seemed to hold each other to a little higher standard as evidenced by their questions and comments. We had a First Nations guest speaker present before developing the inquiry question and she presented a lot for the students to think about which strengthened, and focused, the questions generated as possible inquiry questions.

Once underway, students responded to the specific questions of their peers and then explored their own questions regarding Reconciliation, via the Inquiry Journals that were swapped from class to class and student to student. The intent was to have students not only do research, ask questions and share opinions, but also to interview people who were Aboriginal or connected to the government, connect their investigation to EFP coursework, and to include images that represented their content. This proved ambitious given that many of the students in the EFP classes\* struggled to work without one-on-one support.

Many students completed some components and a few completed all of the components in each entry. Responses to peer questions from a different class were often deeply thoughtful and candid. The interviews were powerful and revealing but this did not always come out in the journals. Taking the journals home resulted in some of them not coming back! We kept them in the classroom thereafter.

We used a photo-printer for student images and this worked well. Students took pictures with their phones, or brought up images on the browsers on their phones, and printed them in class to be included in their journals. Several students did their own artwork with the supplies provided. Though we couldn't get the library for both classes, having a class all researching their own topics and collecting information to put in their journals was successful. The cultural canoe trip with Takaya Tours connected the students with the Tsleil Waututh people revealing what these First Peoples feel is important in terms of achieving Reconciliation.

\*Note: There is still a perception that EFP classes are easier than 'regular' English classes and, as a result, there can be higher numbers of special needs students.

**Checking:** The students have learned from each other and from research to deepen their knowledge about what things play into achieving Reconciliation for both First Peoples and the government. They have an appreciation for the varying impacts aspects of Reconciliation had, and have, on First Peoples within and without their classes. They also have an appreciation for the breadth of the topic! We asked students to share what they knew, what they had questions about and where they learned what they knew, both initially and then to see growth.

As expected, some students came to the class with more initial understanding than others and there are some misunderstandings of First Peoples issues. Some students expanded their thoughts on the topic of issues affecting Reconciliation and others narrowed their focus.

**Reflections/Advice:** Be flexible! There were so many significant changes that we had to make due to factors outside our control, and to accommodate the abilities of the students, that our Inquiry was very much changed from what we had planned. And, we had to get used to making mistakes from which we learned. We also learned that, despite diverse opinions on the Inquiry question, students were thoughtful, often passionate, and curious during their investigations. So, trust that you WILL get something valuable from your inquiry because the students will come through, often in ways you won't expect. The Inquiry Journals are ongoing and this report reflects a point in the process of our student-led inquiry and we plan to continue them next year.