



## 2014 - 2015 AESN Case Study

**School:** Dover Bay Secondary   **District:** #68 Nanaimo Ladysmith

**Area of Focus:** Transitions

**Inquiry Team Members:** Jared Anaka, Ray Andrews, Kuldeep Basi, Lynn Brown, Rhonda Cailier, Kristen Foglia, Neil Holmes, Michelle James, Leila Lattimer, Dave Nelson, Burton Wei, Sonja Wykpis, John Young

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**Your focus for this year:** Aboriginal Understandings – Grade 8

Our team focused on fostering and developing our own and students' foundation of knowledge surrounding the past and present history and culture of Aboriginal people in Canada. We will support a deeper level of thinking and understanding of the historical and contemporary contexts. We unpacked the effects and impacts of colonization moving through the topics of colonization, assimilation, rebellion, resistance, and reconciliation. We want to develop responsibility, respect, relationships, and reverence as a community of learners. We aim to guide our learners to analyze and reflect on the connection of past events, to present day issues so that they can critically think about and contribute to a diverse and inclusive Canadian future.

**Scanning:** Throughout the Dover Bay Secondary community, there is an identifiable lack of understanding, awareness and consideration of local, provincial and national Aboriginal issues. The school leadership team often struggles with how to incorporate Aboriginal content and awareness into courses and throughout the school. Common questions from school leaders: what do I include? Where does it fit? And how do I fit it in? When challenging topics comes up in class or in school wide discussions, there are often generalizations and token lessons provided, but the depth of understanding is limited and often overlooked.

**Focus:** Our team focused on fostering and developing our own and students' foundation of knowledge surrounding the past and present history and culture of Aboriginal people in Canada. We will support a deeper level of thinking and understanding of the historical and contemporary contexts. We unpacked the effects and impacts of colonization moving through the topics of colonization, assimilation, rebellion, resistance, and reconciliation. We want to develop responsibility, respect, relationships, and reverence as a community of learners. We aim to guide our learners to analyze and reflect on the connection of past events, to present day issues so that they can critically think about and contribute to a diverse and inclusive Canadian future.

**Hunch:** There is a general lack of knowledge about Aboriginal understandings among staff and students at Dover Bay. Some teachers have included a significant amount of Aboriginal content in their courses; however this is not consistent across grades or throughout subjects with many teachers including insufficient content. This struggle to incorporate Aboriginal content is not exclusive to our school; it is a challenge being faced throughout our district and larger community. There is a desire to address this challenge and we at Dover Bay want to take initiative and drive our district and community forward into a future that embraces and celebrates indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing.

**New professional learning:** Our student learners undertook an inquiry in Humanities that focused on Social Injustice around Aboriginal Understandings, with three focus areas: purposeful segregation, acts of inhumane treatment, and negative stereotyping. We looked at these focus areas in the context of: colonization, life on reserves, and residential schools. Students and teachers were part of several presentations from guests, including two presentations by Leila Lattimer. The first was introductory in nature about the acts of government pertaining to Aboriginal peoples in Canada, and the second was a presentation about empathy. Humanities classes also had a powerful presentation from one of our EAs, Rhonda Caillier, whose father attended residential school.

As well, students participated in literature circles, reading one or two books each and sharing knowledge and thoughts around Aboriginal understandings. A couple of examples of books read were: *My Name is Seepetza*, *Will's Garden*, and *Goodbye Buffalo Bay*. These were shared by our district Aboriginal Education Centre, and Michelle Swecera was extremely helpful in putting together these literature bins for us.

Writing included "in-role", a mock interview, and poetry. Some classes did artwork, and wrote essays on various topics. As well, students completed a short "5 W's" biography based on a person mentioned in Wab Kinew's video "Heroes."

In Science, students completed a 'traditional medicinal plants' project over the course of a week.

As a culminating activity, with support from our formal leaders and our Parent Advisory Council (PAC), we were able to purchase moccasin kits for all grade 8 students, then meet in our multi-purpose room to build the moccasins, with the help of Leila Lattimer, who also brought Joy Bremner and other presenters from the local Métis Association, who shared their knowledge and skill with our students.

The students final presentation of learning of Aboriginal Understandings was on Thursday, April 9. Approximately 60 students presented, and the evening was attended by about 100 parents, guests, and community members, including members of our Board of Trustees, and district senior management. Many students completed trivia-style board games, including questions they designed, and ranging in difficulty from literal, to inferential, to critical thinking questions. Feedback from this evening has been positive.

Teaching staff involved in the inquiry have increased their knowledge and understanding in many ways as well. Many teachers participated in (at many different levels) in UBC's recent MOOC entitled "Reconciliation Through Indigenous Education." Although some staff were not

able to fully complete the course, all took away important lessons from some parts of the course offerings.

As well, several staff participated, with support of our formal leaders, in the recent Canadian Assessment for Learning Network conference held at the Coast Bastion Hotel April 10 and 11. Valuable connections were made between the importance of assessment for learning, inquiry, and Aboriginal education.

**Taking action:** Our team used a combination of strategies to introduce new material to students. As stated above, novels were provided and information was shared among students using Lit Circles and journal writing. Students also wrote in-role and completed other writings (interviews, paragraphs, essays, poetry) to share their new learning. The final project included research deeper into the topics introduced (purposeful segregation, acts of inhumane treatment, negative stereotyping). Students formulated questions/answers in a trivia game concept which was presented along with their other writing in a Presentation of Learning at the end of the unit. As well, current events were used in some classes to connect past and present under these topics. As stated above, the final presentations were attended by over 100 parents and guests, and it was an extremely successful evening. Feedback was especially positive around the depth of students' knowledge and their ability to express their learning.

**Checking:** Feedback from students and parents at the end of the unit was very positive. Students reported that they were able to share their knowledge with others, including parents, after having little to no previous knowledge of the topics learned and researched. Parents were extremely impressed at the knowledge students were able to share, and the level of knowledge they possessed. The team is extremely happy with the results of the unit. Performance standards were used for the writing portions of the unit.

**Reflections/Advice:** Our team learned much from the experience. Many teachers reported learning as much as the students about the issues and topics raised as part of the unit. Some of the important feedback from students especially, included the length of time spent on the unit (too long) and the negative focus of some of the materials. We also learned that perhaps the breadth of the topic was too large, as we are moving forward to try to plan a "scope and sequence" for the transition of these students to grade 9.

Our staff at Dover Bay recently agreed to move our program forward to include both grade 8 and 9 for 2015-2016. We were able to meet and plan regularly as a teaching group to plan for next year. We collected feedback from students and parents about the effectiveness of our program this year, and that will impact how we plan for moving forward next year. We will meet more in our regularly scheduled PLC time next year to discuss the effectiveness of the Aboriginal Understandings unit, and how we can better include Science and Math in the planning to truly create a cross-curricular inquiry. Plans for the rest of the inquiry grant include continuing to build our resources for grade 8 learning, and now to start to build a resource base for grade 9, and also to continue to try to book Cathy Cameleri's "Building a Village" presentation for our staff.