



2015-2016 AESN Case Study

School: Silverdale Elementary

District: #75 Mission

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Our focus for this year: At Silverdale, the main focus was on the Seven Sacred Teachings. By working with all classes and students on these teachings we wanted to create cultural awareness, inclusivity, and high levels of student engagement on a shared school-wide theme.

Scanning: Aboriginal Education learning opportunities were reported to be valued and appreciated by all students. Students particularly loved Aboriginal Cultural Day activities and guest visitors. However, on our annual “Satisfaction Surveys,” students reported that they were not learning much about Aboriginal Education, which was concerning.

Hunch: On our “Sense of Belonging” surveys, students with Aboriginal ancestry reported that engagement with the Aboriginal Education program and Liaison Worker had enhanced their self-awareness and sense of belonging, and that they were enthusiastic about participating in the program and learning about Aboriginal culture, history, traditions, and ways of knowing. Because this data did not match our “Satisfaction Survey” data, we wondered if the nature of separate special days (while appreciated and anticipated), without ongoing learning through the year might leave students feeling disconnected.

New professional learning: New areas of professional learning we explored focused on how we can tie the Seven Sacred teachings into our work with the new BC curriculum. Our district Aboriginal Education department provided some resources for study, community activities for staff, and conference/ workshop learning opportunities that could benefit our program. As well, the Teacher Librarian from the Siwal Si’wes District Library came and shared resources with us and created an online Learning Commons with reference material and teaching samples for staff to use.

Taking action: What we did:

- Our Teacher Librarians worked with all students sharing stories about the Seven Sacred Teachings. They made literacy connections, did research projects, completed fine arts work, and composed written assignments. Learning happened over the course of the year.
- Our Aboriginal Liaison Worker (ALW) worked with whole classes as well as with small groups with students with Aboriginal ancestry to further explore the teachings through cultural activities. She shared stories and legends in whole class time, did craft, handiwork, and cooking activities in small groups, and spent “Forest Friday” afternoons with our K/1 class out of doors to teach Halq’emýlem and share traditional knowledge with the students about their days’ learning.

- Our Halq'éméylem teacher worked with the other classes doing language lessons that incorporated games and songs as well as vocabulary of the Seven Sacred Teachings.
- I arranged an artist in residence legacy project that all students participated in. The ceiling tile project is at the front of the school so all students, staff, and visitors pass through the piece.

Checking: While we have to wait for next year's "Satisfaction Survey" data for student perceptions of learning about Aboriginal Education, informal checking has yielded positive feedback. Students and staff appreciated whole school involvement and students were frequently talking about and referencing the Seven Sacred teachings work they had been doing. The family community has also been vocal in support of the student work, which is wonderful.

Reflections/Advice: No project proceeds problem-free 😊. A few of the difficulties we encountered were:

- Teacher Librarian (TL) changes- Our TL was a very enthusiastic participant in the project. However, she became the full time TL for the Siwal Si'wes Library, meaning a new TL would be joining us who may have different views and/or investment in our project. We were fortunate to gain an equally enthusiastic TL who embraced our project goals and brought new ideas to the students. Our connection with the Siwal Si'wes Department also improved and teachers ended up doing more collaborative work as a result.
- ALW- Our ALW was very flexible and accommodating which was appreciated by all. The "Forest Friday" time enabled her to develop really strong bonds with the Division 5 class as well. One of the ongoing challenges within our Aboriginal Education program is teacher reluctance to let students leave "regular" class for small group activity. While I agree that whole class opportunities are very important, we feel there is also a place for a small group. We will need to continue building perception and value in this area.
- Halq'éméylem- We had to ensure teachers were flexible with their times, as our Halq'éméylem specialist was often late or absent. This can be challenging for teachers who tend to be very schedule-oriented. It will take time to get all staff to appreciate and accommodate cultural differences in regards to time.
- Artist in Residence- We had a fair bit of difficulty getting our Artist in Residence project going. We ended up with four artists over the course of the year, three of which had to pull out of the project for personal reasons. This ended up pushing the project back quite late in the year and necessitated some changes to the pieces we had planned to create. The final project did come out beautifully though.