



## 2015-2016 AESN Case Study

**School:** Woodlands Secondary School

**District:** #68 Nanaimo Ladysmith

**Inquiry Team Members:** Kelly Barnum, Michael Busche, Jean Kloppenburg, Cynthia Ngo, Fabian Poulin, Emily Recalma, Laurie Sieber, Clarice Tyce,

**Contact:** Jill Bailey

**Our focus for this year:** To enhance Aboriginal Understandings in a meaningful way across the curriculum, at the grade 8 level.

**Scanning:** We interviewed 12 students. These dialogues revealed a need for integrated, collaborative approaches to Aboriginal Understandings in the classroom. They revealed a desire for relevancy, energy, and connectivity. The First Peoples Principles of Learning remind us that '[l]earning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational'; that it is 'focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place. Our conversations with students reminded us that this needed to be at the forefront of our approach.

**Focus:** We decided to use Cedar: The Tree of Life as a unifying theme, as we believed that it would lend itself to a multitude of opportunities to study the cedar tree's significance, spiritually, practically, authentically, across the curriculum in a way which focused on local Aboriginal culture.

**Hunch:** We knew that colleagues were working in isolation, and struggling to incorporate Aboriginal understandings into the curriculum, especially those teaching math and science. We knew that often teachers avoid Aboriginal content entirely because they feel underqualified, they don't know the subject matter, or they don't believe Aboriginal understandings are applicable to their subject matter. Wanting to avoid trivialization of content, often it is not being included at all. We wanted to create an opportunity for colleagues to collaborate, take risks together, and support each other in providing students with meaningful Aboriginal Understandings content.

**New professional learning:** Experiential, collaborative learning centered around *local* Aboriginal understandings provided teachers and students with a unique opportunity to engage with each other as well as the inquiry focus.

**Taking action:** Once we had decided on the format of what we wanted the two-week project to look like, we met in groups according to our disciplines, brainstorming on lesson plan ideas as well as collecting relevant resources. Determining a calendar schedule for the two weeks was challenging, in order to make it work for all of the teachers involved, and especially to time it properly with the grade 8 rotations, so time to meet and organize was essential.

**Checking/ Reflections/Advice:** As educators, and life-long learners ourselves, we are continually looking to improve our approach and practices. Through our student reflections, we determined that our inquiry actually *increased* curiosity in many wanting to know even more about local First Nations history and culture. Through our teacher reflections, we determined

that the keys to this project were support from formal school leaders, time to meet with each other, and cultural resources.

This cross curricular Aboriginal Inquiry project also includes the following:

- 'Cedar' – Importance of Cedar to British Columbian First Nations (power point)
- 'Western Red Cedar' – Science 8 (power point)
- 'Cedar Project Power Point Presentation'
- Woodlands Secondary Grade 8 Cross Curricular Aboriginal Inquiry Project (document)