

Janice McEwen

Aboriginal Traditional Teachings with Louise Milburn

Prescribed Learning Outcome: Oral Language (Speaking and Listening)

Purposes (Oral Language)

To interact and collaborate in pairs and groups to support and extend the learning of self and others, explore experiences, ideas and information, and incorporate new experiences into own thinking.

To express ideas and information in a variety of situations and forms to explore, respond, recall, describe, narrate and explain.

Strategies (Oral Language)

Select and apply a range of strategies such as drumming, learning traditional songs, making Ojibway shakers, listening to the teachings of Anishinaabe elder and traditional teacher, Louise Milburn, and participating in an Aboriginal circle to interact and collaborate with others in pairs and groups. This includes initiating and sharing responsibilities, listening actively, contributing ideas, supporting the ideas of others and seeking out diverse perspectives.

Thinking (Oral Language)

Speak and listen to make personal responses to Aboriginal traditional teachings by generating thoughtful questions and making inferences. Interpret and evaluate ideas from the teachings to personalize ideas and information and to explain the importance and impact of historical, social and political contents.

This project started with my multi-generational and multi-ethnic Grade 12 class expressing enthusiasm for my proposal that we explore Aboriginal traditional teachings with Anishinaabe elder and traditional teacher, Louise Milburn. On the first day, the entire class drummed and sang with Alternative Education staff, students and Louise. Following that, they sat in a circle in the All Nations Room and listened to Louise as she opened with a drum and prayer song, and shared traditional teachings and stories in the oral tradition. The teachings of the Medicine Wheel were about looking inward at one's life with honesty. Through this inner reflection students were encouraged to look at both healthy and unhealthy cycles in their own lives and within their communities, so that they could be instruments of change in this time of healing. The students interacted orally with Louise and each other as they explored new experiences, ideas and information. They also incorporated new perspectives and understanding into their own thinking.

The English 12 students experienced an ancient traditional form of healing while they lay on yoga mats and Louise sang and drummed over them with songs that were over ten thousand years old. Some of the students were brought to tears by this experience. Louise shared that she was taught by her late

elder, Calvin Sault, that there are three ways of healing: crying, shaking, and yelling. Sometimes these healing songs will bring forward a release. Several students later visited Louise individually seeking further knowledge and understanding in the “healing room”.

The following week, the students interacted and collaborated in pairs and groups as they made traditional Ojibway shakers. This hands on activity required that they initiate and share responsibilities, listen actively and contribute ideas and support the ideas of each other. One of the adult African students spontaneously broke into song, while trying out her shaker, and the entire class eagerly joined in. The Aboriginal spirit and joy was very much alive in the room!

On the final day, the students drummed, sang, spoke and shared a multi-national pot luck celebration. This took place in the All Nations Room where the students returned to the circle to share their personal learning and reflections and to express gratitude for this experience. Judith Reid spoke to the group about the recent Elders Project at SJ Willis and offered each student a copy of the published book. Students were eager to receive this and appreciated her contribution to the circle.

The following quotations are directed to Louise from student participants:

Thank you for introducing me to First Nations' culture. You have opened the door for me to explore myself. I wish you great happiness and a peaceful life. Susan

Thank you for your insight, help, and instruction. I value your words and teachings of wisdom. David

Thank you so much for the rich experience and teaching you brought to us. Kyle

Thank you for showing me all these things. I love them. Taylor

I was surprised to learn that traditionally Life-givers/ women were treated with respect because the Aboriginal people knew that the health of the community was directly related to the health of the Life-givers. It is time for those teachings to spread so women can thrive and be well in all cultures. Meghan

As a student with a Coast Salish background, the opportunity to experience First Nations culture and traditions with my classmates was very special. This sharing of cultures brought us closer together and we formed a community. C hesa

I want to share with you that I'm Aboriginal and I've been telling my Grandfather about what we're doing and he cries. I'm really grateful to learn the culture that he could not share. Carolynn