

# ity in the School Community

Groups explored the myths and legends of different First Nations groups and these stories, songs, and poems addressed other language tasks such as: retelling, sequencing, and identifying plot, character, climax, and resolution. The teacher-librarian encouraged the reading of dual-language books, accessible to both students and parents, from the library. One of the sub-tasks for the unit was to produce a reading response and reflection in the form of a flipbook, which could be written in two languages. Aboriginal stories often use repetition and rhythm and are particularly suited to English Language Learning (ELL) students. These reading activities were conducted by the teacher-librarian in the library and also by language teachers. Families were encouraged to actively support this process, even by contributing to the reading responses themselves. Through all these channels, students and their families were exposed to reading quality Canadian children's literature reflecting the rich imagery and themes of First Nations culture.

## Drama and Purposeful Communication

Drama was an important part of the unit so that students could interpret their understanding of the texts while contributing their own creativity. Again, the curriculum guided the focus with attention being paid to using tone, pace, pitch, and volume appropriately. Facial expression, gestures, and eye contact were explored as part of the presentation, with sensitivity to cultural differences. Floradale pushed this further and allowed the students to include their home language in the presentation and gave the students the opportunity to perform in front of a live audience—their families. Videotaping the proceedings demonstrated how the school treasured the efforts of the students.

## Establishing a Dialogue with the Community

Anyone who works in a multi-cultural environment will recognize the many barriers to communication with families—starting with language itself. Floradale cleverly packaged the culminating activity as part of a school-wide occasion, which added relevance and a sense of belonging to the school community. A speaker from a First Nations group was invited. Invitations were sent out, refreshments were ordered, staff and volunteers were given their duties, and the evening's entertainment unfolded in the hub of the school: the library. Families, of course, were eager to see their children perform, but this situation was much more potent than other performances. The families were invested; they had shared the readings and contributed to the drama preparations with their children. They were showcasing their own heritage at the same time as they were becoming familiar with that of the First Nations. They were participating in Canadian life and their children were engaged. The school library provided a safe, non-threatening venue and they felt welcome. Frequently, school is totally separate from family for recent immigrants and this breeds isolation and disempowerment, and dilutes the efficacy of teaching, however good. Family Reading Response is an excellent vehicle to bring a number of pedagogical strands together with emotional and cultural support. This can be used to grow a school community together and achieve student success. This occasion also celebrated the cultural treasure created by the First Nations and fostered an appreciation and respect for all cultures and languages. ■

