



## 2013-2014 AESN Case Study

**School:** John Barsby Community Secondary

**District:** SD68, Nanaimo-Ladysmith

**Area of focus:** Enhancement Agreement

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**Question / focus area:** Will extended and in-depth support to teachers in our main curricular areas at John Barsby with regard to incorporating Aboriginal material into the classroom help build teacher confidence in and interest in regularly and methodically incorporating Aboriginal content into their classrooms. Will this also increase student interest in and understanding of Aboriginal history, culture, and perspectives?

**Scanning:** At Barsby, we have a staff that is, on the whole, committed to and accepting of Aboriginal Education goals and activities. However, several staff members have told our department over the years that they are uncomfortable with delivering Aboriginal material in their classrooms because they are not familiar with it, are afraid of violating protocols, or are afraid of criticism. For this Inquiry, we worked hard to get a cross-curricular team of teachers on board, many of whom are department heads, who have agreed to incorporate at least one major Aboriginal presenter or resource into their curriculum for the 2013-14 school year. Our department worked in conjunction with teachers and presenters to provide any needed support.

**Focus:** As mentioned, our focus was to apply our question to every major curricular area in our school with the intention of seeing teachers more confident about and interested in incorporating Aboriginal material into their classrooms on their own. We know large numbers of Aboriginal resources and offers to support Aboriginal materials in the classroom are often not accessed or are accessed by the same teachers year after year. We would like to see Aboriginal material utilized in new curricular areas and tried by teachers who have not traditionally done so.

**Hunch:** Generally we have noticed that Aboriginal material is incorporated into a classroom as a special case incident such as having a single guest speaker visit, or trying an Aboriginal resource once, or for a special occasion. Our district Aboriginal Resource Coordinator has confirmed this. We would like to help teachers utilize resources, approaches, materials, and perspectives that they can adapt and use not only this year but in future years.

**New professional learning:** Our Aboriginal Education department offered support in the form of resources, speakers and community resource people, class visits, lesson plans, team teaching, modeling, follow-up, and more. Following discussions with the teacher about what he/she envisioned for their class, we helped to develop materials and support that teacher in his/her comfort zone so that by the time the Aboriginal material has been worked with, that teacher could extend his/her use and experience beyond their comfort zone. We learned valuable lessons about screening resources and presenters and discovered new resources we did not know existed before. We learned how to work with teachers of different backgrounds and perspectives, learned our teachers' strengths, and built relationships with staff.

**Taking action:** First we found teachers who were willing to try out or develop ideas for their classes, or who simply took us up blind on our invitation to incorporate Aboriginal material into their classrooms. We offered this opportunity at the last staff meeting of the 2012-13 year, and built a strong community of willing partners for our Inquiry. More teachers participated as the year progressed until we had visits to, offered support in, and made presentations for approximately 20 classes dealing with 13 different Aboriginal topics in 11 courses covering such diverse curriculum areas as digital media, PE, Art, Foods, Socials, English, Law, Dance, and English with nine different teachers. One particular class incorporated a school-wide presentation. The only core curriculum area that we missed was science/math.

**Checking:** We intended to complete our initial involvement with classes at the end of first semester and then track teachers to see if they incorporated materials on their own in second semester. However, due to the large number of requests for classroom involvement and the complexity of setting presenters up and gathering resources, partnered with our usual work load, we ended up continuing our work throughout the entire year and collecting feedback and evaluation as we went.

Students wrote post-it note posters, gave qualitative and verbal feedback in classes, provided actual survey feedback, and made informal comments. Teachers gave qualitative, survey, and informal comment feedback.

Some of our projects/presentations worked really well. These had to do with incorporating Aboriginal literature into English classes, the Residential School materials into socials classes, petroglyphs and salmon carving into art classes, Aboriginal foods into the foods classes, and Inuit sports and games into the PE classes. Our school held a challenge against another secondary school with regard to the Northern Games. This was valuable in terms of building community and connections, as the same secondary closed in June 2014 with half of its students transferring to Barsby.

There were what we would regard as some significant failures from which we learned valuable lessons. In one instance we had issues with regard to a teacher's respect for the presenter and for class content. The local Coast Salish dance presentation was not successful with students, and set us back in terms of student reception of Aboriginal

material; this was due to our department's failure to rigorously screen the presenter's abilities, and then our failure to cancel the second presentation when the first proved inadequate. A well-known artist who presented to one senior class got a mixed reception, but generally appeared to be unprepared and did not deliver the material we requested.

Having said that, we also had some outstanding successes. Students warmly received the Metis jigging when it was incorporated into our school's Northern Games in the spring, as the full floor of dancing students proved. Most students in the Socials classes were keenly interested in the Residential School lessons and teachers have said they will continue this work on their own. The Aboriginal literature classes sparked a lot of interest in students who creatively re-wrote Aboriginal identity poems by rearranging the words from the original. Many of our teachers will be incorporating Aboriginal literature into their regular lessons this coming year. The art lessons worked well with students, who visited our local Petroglyph Park, made small petroglyph plates and prints, and produced a poster that was to have been used as a wall decoration for the district Aboriginal Grad (cancelled due to labour action). The art class also had a local carver visit them for over four classes to refine and finish a long-abandoned, 6-foot salmon carving that had been stored in our department offices for years. A core group of three or four students worked with the artist to complete the piece.

Our department will extend its work as a result of this Inquiry. We need to give support to two teachers who made specific resource requests in our initial survey in the fall of 2013 but who were overlooked for that support as they have the same grade and subject area courses this year. We will continue to offer support of all kinds to teachers incorporating Aboriginal materials this year.

**Reflections/Advice:** We learned that we need to screen our classroom presenters better; to be flexible to add extra classes, presentations, materials, and resources when teachers and students show an interest; to shift our focus in order to overcome resistance; to read our initial needs surveys throughout a project to make sure we haven't missed or overlooked something; and to make every effort to support our teachers who are taking their first steps to incorporating Aboriginal materials into their curriculum. Our advice to other schools would be to start with areas of strength, to start small (much smaller than we did), to rigorously screen presenters to avoid setbacks regarding Aboriginal material/culture, and to bank heavily on reliable district and reliable community resource people.