



2014-2015 AESN Case Study

School: Fraser Heights Secondary **District:** #36 Surrey

Area of Focus: Enhancement Agreement

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Question/Focus Area: How will targeted increase of Aboriginal Curriculum materials increase knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal history, traditions and cultures for all learners and motivate them to sign up for English First Peoples.

Scanning: We noticed that students were choosing to sign up for BC First Nations 12 in significant numbers over the past 10 years and the past three years the school was able to run multiple classes, yet that enthusiasm was not transferring over to English First Peoples registration. Over the past 10 years the school had built up a significant Aboriginal Literature collection for classroom use yet with staff turnover, the collection of current, contemporary literature was underutilized. For our team this meant we had to focus on multiple levels of intervention/communication and changes in order to promote student awareness of and engagement with Aboriginal Literature, increase teacher awareness of and provide resources and strategies for using the Aboriginal Literature collection, with the goal of increasing the numbers of students choosing English First Peoples as their senior English Language course for graduation requirements.

Focus: We chose to focus on strategies to promote Aboriginal Literature and raise student awareness of Aboriginal Literature by creating a range of promotional materials, placing said materials in high visibility areas, running school wide events focused on promoting the Aboriginal Literature, and running a teacher professional development session focused on the school's and district's Aboriginal Literature resources available for classroom use as well as teachers peer sharing and peer mentoring how they have used some of these resources in their own classrooms. By focusing in on and promoting Aboriginal Literature, could we get students engaged with Aboriginal Literature in meaningful ways and inspire students to sign up for English First Peoples?

Hunch: It seemed that even with some promotional materials for English First Peoples 10 – 12 at course selection fair as well as a write up in the course selection book, few students were aware of Aboriginal Literature, the opportunity for choosing the course at course selection time, or were hesitant that such a choice would limit or restrict their ability to apply for post-secondary options across North America. Furthermore, it seemed that with staff turnover

within departments from year to year that classroom teachers weren't as aware of or as comfortable with choosing Aboriginal Literature choices for study within their classrooms. Our hunch was that if we could aggressively promote English First Peoples as a course selection option as "current, contemporary, Canadian", and promote Aboriginal Literature as a positive reading choice for leisure and academic study within the school as a whole, as well as provide teachers with tools and resources necessary, we might be able to increase the number of students interested in enrolling in English First Peoples courses.

New professional learning: In order to disseminate to staff the range of novel study options available to support topics such as Residential Schools, and the range of non-fiction support materials that are available for further student inquiry research, team members have made the commitment over the past two years to get to know the materials and use them in their own classrooms and be prepared to share with other staff ways in which to use the materials.

Taking action: Our team worked to promote awareness of English First Peoples by creating classroom and hallway promotional posters for the course, a table display and handouts for the annual Course Selection Fair, created a high profile display cabinet promoting the course during the two months of school wide course selection. We worked to celebrate Aboriginal Literature school-wide through an Aboriginal Reads Contest hosted by our school's Teacher Librarian, in our school Learning Commons. For four weeks during the start of term two as students were making their course selections for next year, the Learning Commons promoted Aboriginal Literature and hosted a weekly prize draw for students who read Aboriginal Literature. This was the second year for this contest and the draw box was filled each week, easily tripling last year's participation levels.

Our English Department for the second year running, hosted an Aboriginal Slam Poetry event. To help our English department our grant team has created an annotated bibliography of the school's Aboriginal Literature resources, suggested grade levels and subject areas, where the resources are located, number of copies, when possible names of teachers who have used or could mentor use of the resource, and links to internet based teacher resources to support each literature resource. Prior to the Aboriginal Slam Poetry event our team hosted a Teacher Professional Development session where grant team members and district Aboriginal Department staff highlighted and shared various Aboriginal Literature resources as well as district and school based mentoring options for the resources. The Aboriginal Reads Contest and Aboriginal Slam Poetry event were much anticipated events for students and staff.

Checking: Our goal was to promote English First Peoples and Aboriginal Literature throughout the year. The English department is currently working on its goal to review and assign the texts in the Aboriginal Literature collection to specific grade levels and courses. English, BC First Nations Studies and advanced ELL classes have used a range of literature from the 7 Generations graphic novel series to *The Greats* non-fiction series to texts such as *Monkey Beach* and *Totem*. In some cases, texts such as picture books or graphic novels are used as an accessible entry point for all students in the class. The texts have been successful in providing background knowledge in addition to generating high interest for students in both mainstream

and ELL classes. Some teachers also built lessons around the Aboriginal Reads event in the Learning Commons to allow students to independently explore Aboriginal Literature that piques their interest and connects to themes and topics being discussed. In most cases, readings of the texts have given way to thought-provoking discussions and further learning on significant historical events like residential schools and reconciliation. English and ELL classes have effectively used Aboriginal Literature to develop reading comprehension, discussion and analytical skills through Lit Circles. With increased value and time put into reading and discussing Aboriginal Literature across grade levels, students should become more knowledgeable and comfortable with Aboriginal Literature and topics. The success of this strategy will be reflected in the enrollment numbers for future English First Peoples courses.

Reflections/Advice: Due to late start up and shortened semesters resulting from job action, course selection started the first week of January, so it was not possible to start a school wide Aboriginal Literature focus at the beginning of Semester one which hampered student course selection of English First Peoples. Partnering with Planning 10 teachers to promote English First Peoples would help. Table displays and promotional bookmarks focused on two themes: how English First Peoples is a strong Academic choice for a variety of careers, and that by choosing English First Peoples students would be studying current, contemporary, Canadian literature.

For some students the message of “current, contemporary and Canadian” resonated well and students enjoyed engaging with Aboriginal Literature within their regular English classrooms as well as during the Aboriginal Reads contest through the school Learning Commons. For our school’s high ELL and International Student population as well as within the school’s Aboriginal and general school population there is more familiarity with the course choice yet still great hesitancy to sign up for the course in sufficient numbers to run the course. This hesitancy seems to be concerns about an unfamiliar provincial exam and concerns that post-secondary schools across North America might not recognize the course (this is a concern for many students at our school regarding BC First Nations 12 though the message that the course is equal to Socials 11 and fully recognized is getting out there and many students can ask friends or acquaintances about their experience with taking BC First Nations 12; whereas for English First Peoples the course and curriculum may still be seen as taking on an unknown risk).

Promoting English First Peoples is definitely a multi-year initiative that our team has been promoting for several years. We are seeing positive payoff when Aboriginal Literature is included within the regular English curriculum with students often commenting to teachers that the literature studied was often the most engaging and meaningful of all literature studied in High School, and we hope that with continued emphasis on and promotion of English First Peoples that students will view it as a valuable curriculum choice to meet their learning goals.