



2015-2016 AESN Case Study

School: L A Matheson Secondary **District:** #36 Surrey

Inquiry Team Members: Gurpreet Bains, Annie Ohana, Marik Sandhu, Gillian Swartz, George Voros

Contact: Ohana_a@surreyschools.ca

Your focus for this year: Focusing on student engagement with First Nations content in a way which goes beyond the top down teacher driven approach.

Scanning: We interviewed various staff and students as well as kept track of what First Nations materials and resources were being used within classes, while also considering how the First Peoples Principles of Learning could be used with the incoming new curriculum

Focus: We were hoping to see a change from the fear based, negative thoughts about First Nations teachings. We also hoped to see a growth in the manner and amount in which the Principles are used across curriculum fields. For learners themselves, that they attribute positive understandings and linkages to why Aboriginal Knowledge and content is important to them.

Hunch: Simply speaking, there is a fear of the unknown. Both teachers and students are perhaps not as comfortable because of stigmas that still exist. We wanted to use a positive rather than a negative focus to hopefully change those feelings so that when both students and staff interact with First Nations epistemology and knowledge it is always on the positive.

New professional learning: Professional learnings centered upon Aboriginal scholarship from Aboriginal scholars that spoke of the need to decenter our privileges and own ways of knowledge and explore what our relationships were to Aboriginal peoples and history. This tough, yet much needed work, forces people to engage with the content not just as yet another “multicultural” piece but rather acknowledges the colonial realities that still exist, how many have benefited at the cost of Indigenous Peoples and with that understanding gain a new appreciation for how content and knowledge needs to be brought in.

Taking action: The strategy we used was to build curriculum together. With our various subject matters, we took the First Peoples Principles of Learning as well as other Aboriginal scholarship and implemented what was suggested by them:

- Be authentic.
- Do not simply add Aboriginal content as another multicultural component.
- How do Aboriginal ways of knowledge connect with some of the “hidden” social curriculum we need our students to learn?

With these thoughts in mind, we moved ahead and used Aboriginal understandings and teachings as frameworks within which we built lesson plans and even a mentorship program (in partnership with Senator Reid Elementary) centered around identity.

Checking: Our baseline was the difference in the products we were developing, whereas before there was no Aboriginal infusion, its presence is infused from the rationale of the lesson, through various teaching methods, and at various times the content in and of itself. We are still in early days; we hope to do much more moving forward. As for the students, we have seen a marked improvement in interest from various groups of students which usually didn't have a chance to engage in this content as much, ranging from Punjabi classes to English Language Learning (ELL) students. They want to know more, show keen interest with the material, and also are finding ties to their own cultures, and larger systemic realities that are helping take their learning to the next level. Again we hope to see a wider breadth of evidence across even more students as we expand.

Reflections/Advice: What we learned first and foremost is that by coming together and breaking down the Principles of Learning, the fear simply dissipated from a staff perspective (those engaged in this inquiry). Secondly, that discussions around everything from the repercussions of continued colonization to taking on Aboriginal content in ways that went far beyond simply residential schools allowed for much wider and more positive access. Third, the next step is to see how we implement more of the same next year, but also how to engage younger students as well as Aboriginal learners to a larger scale; we felt that many of our more senior students, Grades 10-12, got access to some of what we worked on, but some of our younger students did not.