

Local Aboriginal Studies Course

Jurisdiction: Prince Edward Island

Contact: Roberta Clark

Level: K-12

Theme: Curriculum/materials

Description of Practice: Local Program added to curriculum

Aboriginal Peoples of Atlantic Canada (formerly Native Studies) is a course recently developed as full credit, open course, for specific high schools across the province. The course is open to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. The course reflects in a positive way many aspects of Mi'kmaq culture, history, language, folklore, government and spirituality, both locally and regionally. The development of a broader appreciation for the backgrounds and perspectives of Aboriginal Peoples improves citizenship skills.

Background:

Several years ago, the Vice Principal of the rural high school where the majority of First Nation students attend from the western part of the province noticed a gap in the supports being offered to Aboriginal students. It was determined this gap could best be filled by raising the awareness of all students with regard to respecting Mi'kmaq culture. It was noted that history and other textbooks did not always do justice to First Nations. The students deserved a different style of portrayal of Aboriginal cultures over the centuries and into the present era. The more students could learn about the past, treaty rights, etc, the better equipped they would be to understand the present circumstances and a brighter future.

Development:

The Vice Principal was supported in his efforts and used Nova Scotia's Mi'kmaq 10 as a guide in the development of the local pilot program entitled Native Studies 801 for their high school. Although based primarily on the Nova Scotia curriculum, there were units directly related to PEI and the teacher often invited Elders and First Nation community members in to assist with instruction.

The course was determined to be successful and discussions were held between the First Nation and school district in the eastern part of the province regarding duplicating this course in that area. In 2001, the small rural high school where the majority of First Nations student attend from the eastern part of the province began a similar local pilot program. In its first year, a Mi'kmaq educator taught the course in this school but she has since moved away. English was the language of instruction in all of these classes although some Mi'kmaq language was incorporated into specific units.

The name of the course has recently been changed to Aboriginal Peoples of Atlantic Canada. In 2006-2007, this course will also be taught in an urban high school with the province's only self-identified Mi'kmaq educator as the instructor.

Evidence:

Originally this local program was taught in only one high school, but recognition of its valuable contribution in raising awareness and respect for Aboriginal Peoples has led to its use in other settings. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students have taken the course and evaluations conducted within the school settings have been positive. It is believed the inclusion of Aboriginal content and perspective will lead to increased understanding and acceptance within the entire school community.

Adaptability:

Nova Scotia's curriculum developments provided the basis for this course on Prince Edward Island. Although the content is specifically Mi'kmaq, the extent and range of the content areas offered throughout the course could be adapted to suit the study of other cultures. The key to success in each of these school settings relies on the teacher's expertise and openness to communicate and work alongside the First Nations in promoting the best possible lessons for all youth.

Further information:

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