

LCEEQ Professional Development and Innovation Grant

Final Report

Diverse and Inclusive Texts in Secondary English Language Arts

English Montreal School Board 2021-2022

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Context:

The English Montreal School Board is made up of some 16 Secondary School and 10 Social Affairs and Outreach Schools that represent a very diverse student body. This project was inspired by a speech delivered by a Sec IV student in the 2020-2021 school year. In her speech she asks teachers to “please, please, please change the books students have to read in high school”. Lack of diversity means students do not see themselves represented in the texts they encounter in the High School English classroom.

Project Goals:

For many teachers, trying to find texts that reflect the experiences of the diverse readers found in our classroom can be a real challenge. In 2014, the social media campaign #WeNeedDiverseBooks highlighted the lack of diversity in books for children and young adults. This has since grown into a larger movement to bring diverse books into the mainstream. Today, teachers and students have access to diverse and inclusive texts as e-books, audiobooks, and other media texts. Yet students are not being introduced to them in the average classroom. In fact, the text students encounter in the classroom rarely act as “...mirrors in which they see themselves and windows through which they see the world” (Rudine Sims Bishop). If we are to have students who become participants in a classroom community of readers, then we need them to have access to diverse and inclusive reading materials.

This project aims to get the conversation going about the need for diversity and inclusion in the reading material offered to students in EMSB high schools. Texts need to reflect the diversity, that goes beyond ethnicity, to include gender, sexuality, cultural and social groups. We also considered the need for texts that help readers become more accepting of neurodiversity as well as physical diversity. This project offered teachers time and professional support to help them help them adopt and integrate more

diverse and inclusive materials into their classrooms and hopefully empower them to confidently bring the texts to their students in the future.

Project Outcomes

Teachers explored issues related to diversity and inclusive education. They became familiar with diverse and inclusive reading materials through reading and sharing of ideas in a community of educators. Ultimately, they will adopt diverse and inclusive texts into their classrooms and share them with the rest of their colleagues.

For the teachers involved in the project, the adoption of the texts read and discussed proved to be the most beneficial project outcome. The teachers involved in the PDIG will continue their professional development by engaging their students in diverse and inclusive book clubs in the 2022-2023 school year. They will also be presenting their project to their fellow teachers during the December 2022 Board-Wide Pedagogical days. The educational community at large will benefit from having access to comprehensive resource lists.

The teachers formed a community with our librarians who supported the project. These are EMSB board librarians Julian Taylor, Tatjana Chartrand-Biello, Jenna Mlynaryk from Royal West Academy, and Sarah Marques from Rosemont High School.

The team of teachers want to present their resources at ATEQ Springboards, future LCEEQ Conferences, or even QPAT. The website, currently under construction, will continue to have resources added to it as they are created.