



FINDING OUR WAY BACK THROUGH A LIVED CURRICULUM

By Alison Lubinski

My understanding of identity has evolved from external influences to a deep connection with my culture and language. Rediscovering identity as Indigenous peoples is essential, guided by the wisdom of Elders and Knowledge Keepers. This journey fosters a sense of belonging and holistic healing.

Boohzoo! Waabijiizi Gookooko’oo Manido Ogichidaakwe. Hello! My traditional name is Grey Owl Spirit Warrior Woman, and I am from the Bear (Makwa) Clan. My English name is Alison Lubinski, I am a proud Métis (Scottish, Irish and Cree descent) woman who has learned through personal struggles and her own trauma that finding one’s identity is a necessary journey that helps us find a sense of belonging.

My understanding of identity has changed over time.

When I was younger, I felt my identity was defined by my friends, where I lived, and the things I had. As I grew older and began connecting with my culture and language, I found that my identity evolved through the rich cultural and social influences that I began to immerse myself in. Identity is a term we are rediscovering as Indigenous peoples. Knowing where we come from, whose land on which we occupy, and who we are as First Peoples, is leading us on a new path in education.

Today, I am beginning to walk a different path, one that includes the rich understanding of the history of my people and my family, and the guidance and support from nurturing Elders and Knowledge Keepers. I am unlearning and relearning the ways of my people and how fulfilling it can be to find a true connection to Mother Earth (Aki) and the world around us.

Today I can walk proud, supporting my students in finding their own identities and supporting their desire to reclaim their own identity. Schools and teachers are doing the hard work to ensure that Indigenous students and their allies have opportunities to find a true sense of belonging and develop a deeper understanding of First Peoples in Canada.

It was when I began working in a small rural high school in the Northern Interlake region and met an Elder that my career, worldview, and identity finally made sense to me and put me on track to holistic healing. I have always felt connected to the land and especially water, but never truly understood why. It was during this time that I was introduced to ceremony.

For one to feel a true sense of healing and connection, participating in ceremony opens a doorway to healing ourselves physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally. This journey has not been easy. It requires a commitment to learning who we are, where we come from, and where we are going. It forces us to peel away the layers of fear and trauma so that we may begin to heal. It requires us to shift and change directions, lose, and gain relationships, and acknowledge our hurt. The knowledge and teachings of land and ceremony that I have received are a powerful gift that I share with my students daily.

I believe in teaching students to lead a good life “Mino-Pi matisiwin.” To me this means living each day with the intent and desire to lead with a good heart, pure intentions, and respect for Mother Earth and all it encompasses. It also means that we must understand that we will all encounter challenges to attaining this goal and at times feel like giving up and make mistakes along the way. We must learn to be patient with ourselves and one another.

Understanding our connections to the medicine wheel and how it supports our emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing is an important step along this journey of self care. Knowing when we are unbalanced allows us to take care of ourselves so that we may heal and become stronger. Learning to care for our land and one another through our understanding and connection to ceremony and the seven sacred teachings allows us to lead a life of

love, humility, respect, courage, wisdom, honesty, and truth.

When we as humanity lead each day with good intentions to follow this road, we are allowing ourselves to live in a good way and begin to find our sense of belonging and discover our gifts and purpose in life. As an Elder once told me, when we are asked to help someone, we never say no, for that may be the one person in our life we are meant to help.

Maybe my story is much like one you have heard before. However, for me it is a neatly woven strand that is part of the braid of my life. Through each of these experiences it connects a pathway for us to make better connections with our friends, families, colleagues, students, and communities. It allows us to appreciate more about Indigenous culture and ceremony. This learning, sharing, and growing together is a unique and important part of our journey to reconciliation. It is a safe place to ask questions, to be vulnerable, and to support our own mental health. When we weave together our understanding of our truths, history, and trauma, learn about the importance of traditional storytelling, worldviews, and ceremony we can begin to walk this journey together on a path to reconciliation. I encourage all educators to take that initial step and walk alongside your students.

HEALING THROUGH THE LAND

Each weave in our braid of learning has an important place in this journey to healing our country. When you consider the importance of knowing about Indigenous history, trauma, the importance of storytelling, looking through the lens of an Indigenous worldview, and connecting through ceremony it is then that healing begins. These connections, relationships, and knowledge must be shared by our Elders. They are the ones to pass down the teachings to each generation.

A sweat lodge ceremony is one way to heal through the land. In my school division staff and students have had numerous opportunities to engage in meaningful connections through medicine harvesting, language classes, smudging, naming ceremonies, powwows, drum songs, drumming, and tipi teachings.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners are engaged in the lived experiences that make up a huge part of our Canadian history. Through these experiences they develop a sense of respect and understanding for a culture that was once lost. Listening to the stories of residential school survivors secures a deeper understanding and acknowledgement that this history was real.

When we create a learning environment that supports Indigenous students and creates a safe place to learn, ask questions and foster allies we are changing the world and creating space for our students to see themselves reflected within their schools. School was once a place where Indigenous children suffered horrible abuse, neglect, and trauma. Today, as a society we are taking the necessary steps to foster healthier and more inclusive relationships with Indigenous students, families, communities, and schools. Carrying our learning forward and respecting the communities in which we live, work, and teach supports the fostering of positive and nurturing relationships.

Carving out our identities as Indigenous peoples involves the careful understanding of our lived history and trauma. As educators it’s our responsibility to encourage connections to the land, storytelling, and ceremony. Weaving these principles through an Indigenous worldview creates a foundation for educators to implement placed based pedagogy for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to re/connect with their identity in schools and develop respect for one another. Providing this platform supports a return to traditional ways of life that are important to Indigenous people and an opportunity to understand more for non-Indigenous students. This can only be achieved through participation and direct experiences.

Schools provide a safe place to engage in this learning. There is still work to be done but we are moving in the right direction. This journey for educators and students has only begun. There is hope in the work that educators, students, communities, and schools are doing in the spirit of reconciliation. I encourage you all to lean into the discomfort that will pave a future forward. 