

HONOURING INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES AND VALUES FOR TRUE RECONCILIATION

By Claudine Lambert

Reconciliation is a process of healing relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. This process needs to start with our children in early years and elementary schools.

The Canadian education system deprived Indigenous people of their languages, cultures and communities – not only through residential schools but also through school curricula. It is of the utmost importance to reverse this damage by following the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 94 Calls to Action*. These 94 calls to action are an appeal to all levels of government, organizations and individuals to make concrete changes in society. They list actions to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of reconciliation and – perhaps most importantly – to enrich students by imparting valuable Indigenous ways of knowing.

Every teacher in every classroom works in a school that is physically connected to Turtle Island land so Indigenous history is already a present influence for us. By consciously incorporating Indigenous values into our school systems, we can make education relevant to Indigenous students who are lacking in such knowledge and who are also disproportionately affected by problematic systemic issues.

We can also provide non-Indigenous students with opportunities to learn about valuable Canadian histories and cultures. Because true reconciliation



is about relationships and progress. Colonialism has had destructive impacts on Indigenous people’s education, culture and languages. Indigenous people are the original peoples of this country and have Treaty and human rights that must be respected and recognized.

Truly everyone can benefit from the Seven Sacred Teachings of Honesty, Love, Belonging, Truth, Wisdom, Humility and Respect I was taught as

a child. Incorporating these values in the classroom is a powerful means of fostering respectful relationships and of creating culturally diverse and safe spaces for all students.

Teachers play an instrumental role in developing culturally competent communities that help us move forward as a nation. Indigenous practices also incorporate helpful new teaching approaches, such as collaboration,

adaptability and difference. It institutes layered concepts, like the importance of language and the geography of stories, land protections and rights, relationality and accountability, a connection to reconciliation, and much more.

RECONCILIATION THROUGH EDUCATION

Reconciliation is a process of healing relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. This process needs to start with our children in early years and elementary schools.

Students must be taught about the history of Indigenous peoples in ways that foster respect and empathy. Students in our schools, throughout Manitoba, must learn about residential schools.

It is crucial that learning about the impact of residential schools, Treaties and Indigenous people’s history and culture are a requirement of the K-12 school system. Curricula must include and respect Indigenous cultures.

Teachers must be trained on how to integrate these teaching methods in their classrooms. All children, but especially our Indigenous children, must have access to learning about their culture and language when possible.

DOING THE WORK FOR RECONCILIATION

My school has well-being assemblies each month where family groups, named after one of the animals from the Seven Sacred Teachings, come together and have a sharing circle that focusses on Honesty, Love, Belonging, Truth, Wisdom, Humility and Respect.

We have decided, as a school, to focus our professional development this year on reconciliation. All staff are engaged in learning about the four seasons of reconciliation through the Outdoor Learning Store and Reconciliation Education.

These online courses and films provide a comprehensive, customized anti-racist education in line with the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 94 Calls to Action*. The aim is to promote a renewed relationship between Indigenous peoples

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and Canada through transformative multi-media learning.

Here are some examples of other things we have done in our school to integrate Indigenous history and teaching methods in our classrooms:

1. During the week of Orange Shirt Day, we do daily activities such as watching the video from Phyllis Webstad who went to residential school and wrote the book entitled *Orange Shirt Day* and tying orange ribbons around our school fence that say, “Every Child Matters”.
2. We have coloured orange shirts and talk about the significance of Orange Shirt Day. We are not simply wearing orange. We are wearing orange to show support to the residential school survivors who had their culture and language taken away from them.
3. We have Elders and Knowledge Keepers coming into our school to teach about reconciliation and culture.
4. We have put up a tipi where we have students take part in drumming with an Elder.
5. We have tied safety pins with beads onto our shoes with the four colours of the medicine wheel.

6. We have a Pow Wow Group coming to teach our students how to dance.
7. We have had Métis musicians play fiddle music for our students while we dance the jig.
8. We have had a Métis Elder teach our students the red river jig and spoons, and how to make bannock.
9. We have had Indigenous authors and illustrators come to read to our students during I Love to Read Month.
10. We have purchased many books in our library and classrooms related to Indigenous culture and knowledge.
11. Our Grade 2 students have developed their own land acknowledgement that is read before each assembly and school concert or event.

I know that some schools offer smudging ceremonies to their students. My cousin is currently a teacher and does this daily with her Grade 5/6 classroom in Winnipeg. Some classrooms have made dream catchers and drums with their students. This list barely scratches the surface. Sky is the limit!

LOOKING AHEAD

We need to close the gaps that exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. A goal in high school, for our Indigenous students, is to focus on more success rates in hopes that they will obtain as much success in education as non-Indigenous youth. This will lead to finishing high school and obtaining sustainable employment for the future.

Funding must be continued for Knowledge Keepers and Elders to enter our schools so Indigenous languages can be protected.

We all share responsibility for maintaining respectful relationships with each other.

The understandings of Indigenous culture and perspectives will help with long term reconciliation, and we need to continue having these discussions and teachings in our classrooms every day. 