

Medicine Walk

Supporting students and walking side by side with members of the Indigenous communities in the “reconciliation through education” process

Start first from within...take your own metaphorical “Medicine Walk”

“This (the problem of education in the wake of Canada’s history of residential schooling) is not an Aboriginal problem. This is a Canadian problem. Because at the same time that Aboriginal people were demeaned in the schools and their culture and language were being taken away from them, and they were told that they were inferior, they were pagans, that they were heathens and savages and that they were unworthy of being respected – that very same message was being given to the non-Aboriginal children in the public schools as well. As a result, many generations of non-Aboriginal Canadians have had their perceptions of Aboriginal people ‘tainted’ ”. Chief Justice Murray Sinclair

Strive for authenticity.

Listen deeply and learn perspectives through direct experience connecting with and doing things with Indigenous Peoples and with First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities – or at the very least dialogue with and seek guidance from those people who have a connection and informed experience and knowledge. Don’t base your understanding on unconfirmed sources on social media or websites.

Listen to storytellers. Read. Walk the land. Spend time on the water. Observe. Connect.

Develop a reflective process.

Learn about the constructs and discourses that have been the subtle message and language used historically by colonizers, government officials, institutions, and the eventual “dominant society” in the formation of “Canada”:

Learn about how the stances and ways of thinking in *terra nullius*, the Doctrine of Discovery, the Great Chain of Being, the Right of Conquest, Westphalian sovereignty, liberalism and self-indigenization have impacted attitudes over time and literally shaped how European explorers, newcomers, settlers contemporary non-Indigenous Canadians and even immigrants from other parts of the world have viewed Indigenous Peoples in North America and elsewhere.

Read the various versions of “The Indian Act” over time (the Gradual Civilization Act of 1857 and the Gradual Enfranchisement Act of 1869). In 1876, these acts were consolidated as the Indian Act). Find analyses of the impact of these acts (ie.

<http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/government-policy/the-indian-act.html>)

Read The Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal Peoples

<http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1307458586498/1307458751962>

Read John Ralston Saul's "A Fair Country: Telling Truths about Canada" and "The Comeback: How Aboriginals Are Reclaiming Power and Influence".

Find out what Chief Justice (now Senator) Murray Sinclair is saying.

Find out what Cindy Blackstock, Marie Battiste and Mary Ellen Turpell-Lafonde have to say.

Find out what Pam Palmater, Wab Kinew, Perry Bellgarde, Chief Isadore Day, Chief Stewart Phillip, Chief Ed John, Chief Clarence Louie and Tanya Talaga have to say.

Read Richard Wagamese, Thomas King, Richard Van Camp, Eden Robinson, Monique Gray Smith, Drew Hayden Taylor, Tomson Highway, Waubgeshig Rice, Daniel Heath Justice and the hundreds of other Indigenous people finding and offering their voice through literature and non-fiction.

Read "First Nations 101" by Lynda Gray.

Read Aboriginal Worldviews and Perspectives in the Classroom: Moving Forward.

Then read the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007)

- Explore Canada's stance on this declaration, historically and currently

As you work through,

- **Think not for or against, but *about*. Think not either/or, but *and*.**
 - **Distinguish between the manner (how the information is presented) and the matter (what is really being said).**
 - **Balance the reflection with dialogue, a meaningful interaction and sometimes even persuasion of others with both publicly available reference points and subtler languages.**
 - **In this reflection, pursue the higher ideals and ethics of authenticity.**
 - **Enliven the struggle through the work of finding accurate history and research.**
 - **Seek out mentors, seek out like minds, then seek out those who would offer you differing views.**
- To do this, understanding ourselves and others, absorb and even acquire rich languages of expression, in the broad sense, including that of the arts, of culture, of gesture, of love.**

Understand the (historical and current) reasons behind the differences in worldview about Indigenous learning processes and learning processes commonly accepted in broader Canadian society, and the reasons for fear if not anger or disdain towards formal learning institutions.

Find out about the experiences and truths now known about Residential School. Read “Shingwauk’s Vision”, Miller. Look at “Where Are the Children” on line (<http://wherearethekids.ca>). Read “Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: final report from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada” and the “94 Calls to Action” in response to the Truths told. Inquire about how Aboriginal children and youth have been regarded in “modern” public schooling – as they emerged from Residential School into public school, up to today. Delve into First Nations, Métis and Inuit education issues as they pertain to Federal First Nations education programs and funding compared to the structures provided by the provinces in public schools (off reserve). Delve into health issues, socio-economic issues, rights issues...all of the barriers and factors which contribute to the present situation for Indigenous peoples in Canada.

In the same way, remember the perspectives on Indigenous Peoples and their cultures you were given in school – and investigate more historical perspectives that Canadians were purposely taught, and sometimes purposefully not taught, in school. Read the now available writings of John A McDonald and Duncan Campbell Scott where their attitudes towards Indigenous Peoples – and their true intentions towards them – are clearly control, oppression, elimination – some would use the term genocide.

Take part in a blanket exercise.

Once you have begun understanding the foundation to the uneasy relationship between Indigenous Peoples and formal learning institutions in Canada, in BC, on the Sunshine Coast...explore culturally respectful, culturally responsive ways of integrating Indigenous Peoples’ perspectives into the learning experiences that you facilitate.

Ask: What is the voice of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit community and families in our area? What do various Indigenous Peoples hold as their vision for and values concerning culture, education, health, their lands and waters, their economy?

In small steps, practice the integration of Indigenous ways, perspectives and knowledge in your life. Let this practice become a “habit of mind”. Strive to consistently add meaningful and inclusive layers to what you are learning.