

łok^wala la xuŋ (Let Him Speak Strong): Integrating First Peoples Principles of Learning for
Students' Success

by

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Abstract

This project, completed as part of a Master's in Education with a focus on Curriculum and Instruction, has two major purposes: To investigate the needs of Aboriginal learners; and to make an easily accessible guide to encourage educators to incorporate the First Peoples Principles of Learning into their practice.

It begins with a brief overview of the history of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada and their relationship with the education system. Next, a thorough review of the literature is offered in an effort to better understand what Aboriginal students need in order to be successful, as well as what factors often influence teachers' ability and/or willingness to begin to include both Aboriginal content and ways of knowing into their practice. This review of the literature resulted in the creation of a website that is designed to act as a handbook of sorts, offering information about Aboriginal Education and ways to apply the First Peoples Principle of Learning in a meaningful way, using service learning as a tool. The entire project has strived to reflect the First Peoples Principles of Learning, in all steps of its completion.

In conclusion, this project aims to guide educators in their efforts to increase levels of success amongst Aboriginal learners and to encourage educators to begin to think about the importance of both Aboriginal content and culture in our classrooms. The result is an informative and practical addition to the conversation about Aboriginal education.

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Chapter One: Focus and Framing

Purpose of Project

During the 2006 Census, 196,075 British Columbians identified themselves as Aboriginal and this continues to be the fastest growing demographic in this province (BC Stats). According to the BC Ministry of Education's Aboriginal Report (2012), nearly 65,000 students in BC were reported to be Aboriginal, and the percentage of Aboriginal students attaining BC certificates of graduation, or Dogwood Diplomas, was approximately 48% compared to 69% of non-Aboriginal students (BC Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 30). These statistics suggest that Aboriginal students are leaving school in relatively high numbers, and it can be inferred that this is due to the current education model not yet meeting their unique needs (Battiste, 2005; CCL, 2007; Cassidy & Marsden, 2009; Hampton & Roy, 2002; Lavallee, 2009; Lee, 2007). Satisfaction surveys, such as the one conducted by the BC Ministry of Education and reported on in the "How Are We Doing?" Report (2012) show that not only are Aboriginal students not achieving at the level of non-Aboriginal students academically, they often feel less safe, connected, cared for and fairly treated than non-Aboriginal students.

School Districts throughout the province are working with a relatively new focus on Aboriginal education and have been creating Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements since 2002. Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements are "intended to continually improve the quality of education achieved by all Aboriginal students; support strong cooperative, collaborative relationships between Aboriginal communities and school districts; provide Aboriginal communities and districts greater autonomy to find solutions that work for Aboriginal students, the schools and the communities; and require a high level of respect and trust to function" (CR

Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement, 2009, p. 1). These agreements act as a guide for Aboriginal education departments throughout the province.

There has also been a big push to include Aboriginal content in all subject areas, in an effort to better meet the needs of Aboriginal learners, as well as educate non-Aboriginal students about the histories of our province's First Peoples. Documents such as the 192 pages *Shared Learnings: Integrating BC Aboriginal Content K-12* (2006) and *In Our Own Words: Bringing Authentic First Peoples Content to the K-3 Classroom* (2012), are just two examples of the many useful resources that are now available as support for educators across the province. Lessons, materials, resources and rationale abound. Aboriginal ways of knowing, however, tend to be less easy for educators to incorporate into their practice, but upon review of the literature in this area one may ask if these approaches to learning may not be equally if not more important than content alone.

Historical Context

Historical practices affect today's Aboriginal communities and continue to influence the success of today's Aboriginal students. Legislation enacted in 1876 by the Canadian government to assimilate Aboriginal people into a Eurocentric society used education as its weapon. The Canadian government enacted a coercive national education program designed to assimilate Aboriginal people into mainstream society through residential schools (Battiste & McLean, 2005; Royal Commission, 1996), in a despicable attempt to "kill the Indian in the child" (para. 1-2).

Barnes et al. (2007) claim "Aboriginal children who attended residential schools were leaving culturally rich societies where family was central, complex religious beliefs were the

basis for numerous ceremonies, and knowledge was passed from one generation to the next” (p. 19). Aboriginal children who were coerced to attend residential schools, left culturally rich societies where family and spiritual traditions were central to their way of life (Barnes et al., 2007). Knowledge was passed down from generation to generation through story, song, and observation. The Canadian Council on Learning (2007) maintains there is a holistic approach to Aboriginal ways of learning, underpinning the notion that “knowledge is not classified into hierarchical competencies or disciplinary specializations,” but all knowledge is “related by virtue of their shared origins (with the Creator)” (p. 5). Aboriginal ways of knowing include the community, natural environment, language, and shared spiritual experiences in the understanding of the interconnectedness of all beings (CCL, 2007).

The Canadian government “adopted a policy of assimilation” (Royal Commission, 1996, para. 1), which reshaped the future of thousands of present and future Aboriginal children across Canada. The lasting effects of attempted cultural genocide, physical and sexual abuse, and the resulting transmission of negative attitudes towards school continue to shape the Aboriginal peoples of Canada’s views on education. Aboriginal students’ perspectives continue to be influenced by their parents and grandparents who were taught to distrust Western education through their experiences in residential schools. Many generations were impacted by the over 130 year reign of residential schools in Canada (IRSR, 2014). These schools are not a thing of the distant past, as so many think, as the last residential school in British Columbia was closed in 1983, and the last in Canada only in 1996 (IRSR, 2014). The Aboriginal students we have in our schools today are still very much affected by the negative impact of residential schools (Battiste, 2005).

Why This? Why Now?

As an immigrant to this beautiful country, I have always felt incredibly grateful to the people of Canada for allowing my family to come here. As I grew older, this gratitude was directed more specifically to the First Peoples of this land, who have shared so much with us all by allowing us to stay.

Upon my travels to Australia I learned about the Aboriginal peoples of those lands and was struck by some of the commonalities, and distinct differences, I saw between the African peoples I had grown up with in South Africa, the First Nations peoples I had grown up with in Canada, and the Aborigine peoples I saw around me. Although these three cultures are unique in continents, cultural practices and ancestry, the issues these three groups of indigenous peoples struggle with in the present time are all too familiar. Although they are culturally very diverse, these three groups have things in common: Colonization by Europeans and present day struggles with poverty, substance abuse, and social and cultural dissonance (Battiste & McLean, 2005).

I was overwhelmed by guilt for my ancestors' contributions to the colonization of these three countries and cultures, and because of my belief in the power of education, began my journey to learn about and contribute to the field of Aboriginal education. I completed my Bachelor of Arts in First Nations Studies and Sociology, focused on Aboriginal content during my Bachelor of Education, and now find myself a part of a Masters in Curriculum wanting to understand how to further my passions in this area.

Due to my own gratitude for the life I have been offered by this country and its peoples, I find myself pursuing the focus question of how to pull in the "push-outs," (Fine & Page, 1994) through putting the First Peoples Principles of Learning into action through service-learning.

Overview of Project

The First Peoples Principles of Learning (2013) form an important foundation for many of the teaching resources focused on the incorporation of Aboriginal content now available, but this project will argue that the Principles can and should be a greater focus in our attempts to incorporate Aboriginal ways of knowing in our schools and classrooms.

First identified in relation to the English 12 First Peoples curriculum, the First Peoples Principles of Learning generally reflect First Peoples pedagogy: The term “First Peoples” includes First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples in Canada, as well as indigenous peoples around the world (FPPL, 2013). Today the term Aboriginal is used in an inclusive way to discuss not only the First Peoples, but Aboriginal peoples throughout the world. These Principles include the ideas that: “Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors; Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place); Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one’s actions; Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities; Learning recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge; Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story; Learning involves patience and time; Learning requires exploration of one’s identity; Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations” (FPPL, 2013).

This project will work to put these Principles into action. Too often they are overlooked, but a practical step by step guide to possible ways of realizing these Principles in classrooms and schools will further the effort to truly incorporate them in meaningful ways. One example, and the focus of this project, will be the application of the First Peoples Principles of Learning through service-learning. Also referred to as academic service-learning, it is “an experiential

learning pedagogy in which education is delivered by engaging students in community service that is integrated with the learning objectives of core academic curricula” (Furco, 2010).

Researchers such as Kraft and Wheeler (2003), Scales, Roehlkepartain, et al. (2006), Tebes, Feinn, et al. (2007), and Clark (1988) have already made the connection between service-learning and the improved success of struggling students. This project will take this idea further, by looking at the potential to pull in the “push-outs” by putting the First Peoples Principles of Learning into action through service-learning.

In an effort to reflect the First Peoples Principles of Learning in this very project, it will attempt to ultimately support the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors, as well as to be holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place), and will recognize the role of Indigenous knowledge (FPPL, 2013). The literature review and completion of the final product of this project will be conducted through reading, conversation, observation, and reflection. The end result will be a handbook designed to lead teachers and schools through the process of putting the First Peoples Principles of Learning into action through service-learning.

Chapter Two: A Review of the Literature

Recurring Themes

The state of Aboriginal education is not only one of interest here in British Columbia or Canada, it is a topic of interest world-wide as the rights of Indigenous Peoples are realised and highlighted by movements such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples . There are many perspectives and a plethora of articles to be read, and there are recurring themes around what we know Aboriginal students need in order to be successful. Williams (2008) states that enhancing the learning of First Nations, Métis and Inuit learners is about restoration, collaboration, visibility and acknowledgement, and positive force, which aligns with the visual representation of the dimensions of Aboriginal education shared in *Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise* (2000).

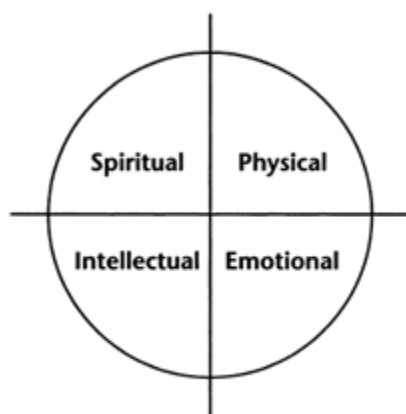


Figure 1. Dimensions of Aboriginal Education (Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, 2000)

Whatever the method of organization, the themes are the same: Aboriginal students, much like all students, must have all of their basic needs met in order to achieve self-actualization (Maslow, 1987). However, although exemplary practices of Aboriginal students

mirror those needed by all students, these practices must also respect the knowledge and perspectives of Aboriginal peoples (Battiste & McLean, 2005).

Physiological and safety needs.

There are many lasting effects of the residential school system such as poverty, high rates of unemployment, families in stress, cognitive dissonance and suicide (Battiste, 2005). Both physiological and safety needs, as outlined in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943) are difficult to address when families and communities are experiencing the long-term effects of assimilation through education. The effects of generational poverty alone are astounding and pervasive, and involve much more than just a lack of finances (Payne, 2005). An individual's emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical resources, as well as his or her support systems, relationships/role models, and knowledge of hidden class rules all affect his or her experience of poverty: Poverty is, after all, the "extent to which an individual does without resources" (Payne, 2005).

Students need to have their physiological and safety needs met in order to be successful. All students, not just Aboriginal students, must have their needs for food, water, and shelter, as well as security of body, resources, family, health and property (Maslow, 1943) fulfilled. Families must be supported, therefore, as it is what our Aboriginal students need. 50 percent of status First Nations children in Canada live in poverty as measured by the Low Income Measure, and "(i)mproved, accessible, culturally relevant education, more local employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, and better infrastructure must be available to on-reserve families if we are to end poverty for these children" (CCPA, 2013, p. 29). The most "powerful... determinant of how families interact with society is socioeconomic status" (Lambie, 2005, p. 2), and how families feel about and interact with schools influences the success of students.

In schools we can address a lot of the requirements of the physiological and safety needs of our Aboriginal students by offering a wide variety of programs ranging from breakfast programs to mentorship and work placements. It has been shown that diet quality impacts academic performance, which is important to children's future education attainment and, thus, their future income, socioeconomic status, and health (Florence, Asbridge & Veugelers, 2008). This cannot be overlooked, and it is vital that these types of programs be conducted in a manner that does not stigmatize already vulnerable students (BC Gov, 2010).

There is little question that education really is the only path out of poverty: "Growth in economic output not only provides the resources for tackling poverty, social exclusion and poor health but also expands human choice. Economic well-being... should thus be recognized as an important component of human well-being" (Helin, 2008, p. 209). Aboriginal students need to have their physiological and safety needs met in order to be successful not only in school but in life as a whole. These needs need to be addressed before the needs of love, belonging, and esteem can be addressed (Maslow, 1943).

Love, belonging and esteem needs.

Although the need for love, belonging and the sense of self-esteem are often underappreciated in our understanding of the hierarchy of human needs (Maslow, 1943), once the physiological and safety needs have been met our students will "hunger for affectionate relations with people in general, namely, for a place in his(or her) group" and strive for a "stable, firmly based, (usually) high evaluation of themselves, for self-respect, or self-esteem, and for the esteem of others (Maslow, 1943, p. 381). Of course a child's sense of love, belonging and esteem are strongly influenced by their experiences at home, but the influence of schools and their staff should not be overlooked.

According to numerous studies, including that of MacIver (2012), teachers hold considerable power in “influencing Aboriginal students’ sense of belonging in school, through their interactions with their students, the curricula taught, and the instructional strategies selected” (p. 161). There is a commonly held belief that the academic performance for Aboriginal students depends on the development of the whole child with “social and emotional literacy, self-esteem based on identity development, cognitive excellence, linguistic fluency, spiritual maturity, and optimal physical development” (Assembly of First Nations, 2012, p. 71). Teachers and schools have a large role in all of these areas of development, and when looking at love, belonging and esteem needs, the importance of relationship building remains a top focus.

So does learning in a culturally affirming environment (MacIver, 2012). The ways Aboriginal youths come to think of their ethnic self-identification are related to whether or not they graduate from high school (Hallett, et al, 2008), therefore culturally responsive teaching must be integrated into our schools, as it is what Aboriginal students need.

In order to have their needs for belonging and esteem met Aboriginal students benefit from Culturally Based Education, which must include the teaching and use of heritage languages, traditional cultural ways and values, using pedagogy that utilizes strategies congruent with traditional culture as well as contemporary knowledge systems, with relevant curriculum that is community based and offers an environment permeated by culture (Assembly of First Nations, 2012).

A sense of belonging and esteem is developed and celebrated through the integration of Aboriginal ways of knowing (Hallett, et al, 2008, Whitley, 2014, & Battiste, 2005) through guides such as the First Peoples Principles of Learning (BC Ministry of Education, 2013). First identified in relation to the English 12 First Peoples curriculum, the First Peoples Principles of

Learning generally reflect First Peoples pedagogy: The term “First Peoples” includes First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples in Canada, as well as indigenous peoples around the world (BC Ministry of Education, 2013). These Principles include the ideas that: “Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors; Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place); Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one’s actions; Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities; Learning recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge; Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story; Learning involves patience and time; Learning requires exploration of one’s identity; Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations” (BC Ministry of Education, 2013). Research has revealed that when schools develop culturally affirming learning environments which profile Aboriginal cultural values, curricula, and activities, and pair this with a focus on strong teacher/administrator-child relationships, Aboriginal students are more successful (MacIver, 2012), and are therefore one step closer to meeting their needs of self-actualization.

Self-actualization.

The need for self-fulfillment through the actualization of a person’s potential should not be underestimated: Even if the above mentioned physiological, safety, love, belonging and esteem needs are satisfied, “we may still often (if not always) expect that a new discontent and restlessness will soon develop, unless the individual is doing what he is fitted for” (Maslow, 1943, p. 382).

The repeated message in the literature is that schooling must be connected to students’ lives, engaging, and collaborative to be effective and culturally responsive for Aboriginal youth

(Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). In order for Aboriginal students to not only fulfill their full potential within the school system but life in general, they must be offered an education that addresses the hierarchy of their needs (Maslow, 1943) and results in self-actualization. Self-actualization cannot be reached without culturally responsive teaching and learning environments, curricula, and relationships (Battiste & McLean, 2005; Whitley, 2014; MacIver, 2012, Assembly of First Nations, 2012). Culture shapes minds, “it provides us with the tool kit by which we construct not only our worlds but our very conceptions of ourselves and our powers” (Assembly of First Nations, 2012). To fulfil the need for self-actualization, we must place education into culture not just culture into education (Battiste, 2005).

What Works and Potential Obstacles

Already, by Grade 4, “a sizable gap exists between average Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student performance (in reading, writing and numeracy)... by Grade 7, the gap in all three areas increases,” and not so surprisingly the graduation rates differ even more substantially (Richards, Hove, & Afolabi, 2008, p. 5). A 32% gap exists between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in the Six-Year Dogwood Completion Rate, which is the proportion of students that complete grade 12 within six years of entering grade 8 (47% versus 79%) (BC Ministry of Education, 2012).

The “‘add and stir’ model of (integration of Aboriginal culture and content) does little to empower students and reconcile their position in society nor does it provide the needed foundation for students to find the awareness or means to overcome the root problems of their oppression” (Battiste & McLean, 2005, p. 7), yet this approach to the inclusion of Aboriginal content and culture is the one most often observed in schools today. Many Aboriginal students struggle in traditional school systems around the world, and the dropout rate of these students

indicates this. Research suggests that one reason for these statistics may be a teacher, school, and Districts' "neglect for the learning styles or culture of this group" (Morgan, 2009). When attempting to meet the needs of Aboriginal learners, teachers, schools, and District's must be sure to avoid the dangers of stereotyping, must deal with misconceptions, acknowledge learning styles and offer culturally responsive teaching that affirms the background of the student, considers their cultures as strengths, and reflects and utilizes students' learning styles (Morgan, 2009).

In studies of the successful integration of Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogical practices, teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions about the changes have been identified as "the crucial factor that can make or break the innovation" (Kanu, 2005). In Kanu's (2005) qualitative study of teachers' perceptions of the integration of Aboriginal culture and content, all teachers believed that the integration of Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives into school curriculum was crucial to student success, and this could be generalised to the greater teacher population, but the research also shows that teachers often credit some sort of "transformational experience" for kick starting their interest and commitment to integration (p. 54). Not all teachers are fortunate enough to have one or more of these so called transformation experiences, but these moments of reflection and realisation are directly correlated with teachers' willingness to take on the challenge of integration of Aboriginal culture and content in their classrooms: "Conceptual change theory suggests that changing teachers' beliefs depends on their recognizing discrepancies between their own views and those underlying new visions of teaching and learning" (Kanu, 2005, p.55).

Also, although teachers generally support the integration of Aboriginal cultural and content, clear differences exist as to how this integration is understood and approached (Kanu, 2005). Levels of integration vary from:

- (a) the contributions approach, where the focus is on teaching students about the contributions made by (Aboriginal peoples);
- (b) the additive approach, where content, concepts, and perspectives from (Aboriginal cultures) are occasionally added to curriculum that remains largely Eurocentric;
- (c) the transformational approach where curriculum topics are taught from multiple perspectives; and
- (d) the social action approach, where based on the transformation approach, students are encouraged to take action for social change (Kanu, 2005, p. 55).

Kanu's (2005) data shows that although there is openness on behalf of teachers to the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives in school curriculum, little progress is being made in the actual realization of this integration. There is often a 'token' commitment to integration, as shown through the additive and contributions approaches most commonly taken by teachers (Kanu, 2005).

There are also the perceived challenges, on behalf of teachers, to integration. Teachers' lack of knowledge and lack of resources are the first and second most commonly perceived challenges to integration, respectively (Kanu, 2005). The perceived racism of colleagues, students and their families is seen as another challenge to integration of Aboriginal content and culture, as well as school administrators' wavering or non-existent support of integration, and fear of incompatibility between school structures and Aboriginal cultural values and practices (Kanu, 2005). Teachers do not hold exclusive responsibility for improving the outcomes of Aboriginal students, it must be a commitment held by all levels of education planning, funding and implementation, but it is also "important to recognize, however, that the improvement of

educational outcomes among Aboriginal students is simply unattainable without buy-in from teachers” (Richards, Hove, & Afolabi, 2008, p. 16).

Whitley’s (2014) study reflects teachers’ perspectives on the integration of Aboriginal content and culture into their classrooms. The teachers who were part of this qualitative study saw the fit between curricula and strengths of students, access to the curriculum, as well as engagement with the curriculum as important aspects to Aboriginal students’ success in interactions with school curricula (Whitley, 2014). “When school curricula (is) a poor fit with the students’ strengths, the students’ interactions with the curriculum (are) negative” but even more importantly, to the teachers in this study and others, simple access to the curriculum as influenced by attendance has lasting effects on Aboriginal students’ interactions with school curricula (Whitley, 2014, p. 167). There is a cyclical pattern of poor attendance, trailing academically, students viewing themselves as less capable than other students, students therefore having low self-esteem, and then missing more school (Whitley, 2014). Furthermore, teachers’ perceptions on Aboriginal students’ motivation must be acknowledged in the discussion of their engagement with curricula: “Staff believed that many Aboriginal students did not seem to connect their schooling with future plans and aspirations” (Whitley, 2014, 168).

Teachers also focus on the ideas of potential “segregation” through pullout programs and Individual Education Plans (IEPs), and potential isolation in the classroom where student needs are not accommodated (Whitley, 2014, p. 169). Balancing the approach to support is important in the struggle to counteract the impulse to “opt out” of schooling (Whitley, 2014, p. 169).

Teacher expectations also affect Aboriginal student success; teachers must hold high expectations of students’ success in order to show them what is possible for them in the future (Whitley, 2014, p. 170). All of these factors can be potential road blocks to Aboriginal student

success as while “interactions with curricula emerged... as the most salient, [and] interactions with school staff came as a close second” (Whitley, 2014, p. 172). Teachers must not underestimate their role in student success, the interpersonal relationships within school environments, namely with school staff, can be particularly influential in the development and school success of Aboriginal students (Whitley, 2014, p. 165).

The integration of Aboriginal content and culture is a journey with many entry points: Teachers, administrators, District staff, and all others involved with the integration of Aboriginal understandings begin their journeys at different places. The learning progression created by Tait (2011) as part of her work with School District 68 (Nanaimo/Ladysmith) acts as a guide for the process. Each person involved in the journey of reconciliation through education comes with their own background and perspectives, and moves towards action/advocacy, as outlined by Tait (2011) at their own rate. The goal is for educators and students alike to move towards providing leadership to enhance others’ knowledge and understanding, seeking out opportunities to act on the injustices towards Aboriginal peoples, while recognizing the influence of dominant culture and striving to foster the Aboriginal Worldview, and demonstrating and practicing knowledge and respect for Indigenous Pedagogy (Tait, 2011). Action/advocacy “implies a demonstration of knowledge, respect and a commitment to advocacy” (Tait, 2011).

Aboriginal Understandings Learning Progression


	<i>Moving Toward the Water</i>	<i>Boarding the Canoe</i>	<i>Raising your Paddle</i>	<i>Journey Into Deeper Waters</i>
	Awareness implies a sense of 'need to know'	Developing implies a willingness to address one's own understandings and beliefs	Acquiring implies a demonstration of knowledge and respect	Action/ Advocacy implies a demonstration of knowledge, respect and a commitment to advocacy
Beliefs and Attitudes towards Aboriginal Peoples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizes that knowledge may need to be enhanced Aware that issues exist around Aboriginal peoples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates a willingness to enhance one's knowledge and understanding May bring an informed perspective to current issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates a responsibility to enhance one's knowledge and understanding Possesses an intention to bring an informed and critical perspective to current issues and acts upon those intentions Demonstrates respect for Aboriginal people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides leadership to enhance others' knowledge and understanding Seeks out opportunities to act on the injustices toward Aboriginal people
Knowledge of Aboriginal Peoples and History on local, regional and national levels	Demonstrates awareness of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Aboriginal peoples and territories Aboriginal languages and cultures Indigenous Knowledge Canadian history as it pertains to Aboriginal people 	Beginning to explore the topics of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Aboriginal peoples and territories Aboriginal languages and cultures Indigenous Knowledge History and the impact of colonization the impact of the Indian Act on present day Aboriginal people the contributions of Aboriginal people to contemporary society 	Demonstrates knowledge of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Aboriginal peoples and territories Aboriginal languages and cultures Indigenous Knowledge History and the impact of colonization the impact of the Indian Act on present day Aboriginal people the contributions of Aboriginal people to contemporary society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizes the influence of the dominant culture, while striving to foster the Aboriginal Worldview Demonstrates and practices a knowledge and respect for Indigenous Pedagogy

Figure 2. Aboriginal Understandings Learning Progression (Tait, 2011)

There are many steps that can be taken to circumnavigate the potential road blocks to Aboriginal student success, and they include teachers, non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal alike, to learning about Aboriginal culture, perspectives, past, present and future, as well as the provision of support that enables practicing teachers to take advantage of professional and personal education opportunities pertaining to Aboriginal culture (Kanu, 2005). The continued effort to provide units of student and other accessible resources and materials for teachers to use in classrooms is beneficial, and all curriculum development “must include Aboriginal culture, content, issues, topics, and perspectives as an integral part” of every subject area (Kanu, 2005, p. 65). School principals and boards must act as leaders and catalysts of integration, and the training and hiring of Aboriginal teachers must continue to be a priority (Kanu, 2005). Above all else, all school staff must engage in “deep reflection about the perceptions they hold for

Aboriginal students” if the success of Aboriginal students is to be realized (Whitley, 2014, p. 176), as “research on best practice models for teaching Indigenous students points to the level of teachers’ commitment as the crucial link to student engagement in the classroom, improvement of student self-concept and student retention rates at school” (Burridge, Whalan, & Vaughan, 2012, p. 149).

Overcoming Obstacles and Meaningful Change

The themes outlined above are not revolutionary, but they do have the potential to be transformative. Overall it takes a whole school and community approach to Aboriginal education in order for Aboriginal students to be most successful. Teachers and their commitment is central to the successful inclusion of Aboriginal content and culture in schools. Research shows the inclusion of these two things in combination with teacher attitudes and perspectives are the difference makers when it comes of Aboriginal students’ success, once their basic needs are addressed.

There is a lot that can be learned from promising programs, and successes abound in programs that support the learning spirit (Anuik, Battiste, & George, 2010). “Practitioners who work with learners... as individuals with their own special gifts, are accountable to their and their communities’ learning needs, assist with transitions into formal learning or back into formal learning, and afford the chances for learners to see their epistemologies and worldviews reflected in pedagogy and curriculum” awaken, nurture, and sustain the learning spirit (Anuik, Battiste, & George, 2010, p. 68). Articles, books and compilations such as *Learning from Promising Programs and Applications in Nourishing the Learning Spirit* (Anuik, Battiste & George, 2010), *Sharing our Success: Ten Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling* (Bell, Anderson & Fortin, 2004), and *Sharing Our Success: More Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling: Band-Operated Schools*

(Fulford, G., Raham, H., & Stevenson, B., 2007), all offer insight into programs and schools that are providing opportunities, and seeing results, for Aboriginal students. Common themes in these success stories include, amongst other things, students' connections to their community (Fulford, G., Raham, H., & Stevenson, B., 2007).

Aboriginal students' interaction with the broader community shapes their self-concept. The impacts of isolation, racism, and few role models affects the sense of hopelessness some students feel (Whitley, 2014). It can be argued that "community-based education is the most relevant type of education for (Aboriginal) students because it acknowledges and accesses students' home communities and knowledge" while making learning more "relevant because of its basis in real-life issues of the communities" (Lee, 2007, p. 197). Learning based in community uses various approaches to learning that validate student strengths and community, as well as traditional knowledge and skills, and attempts to aid student in finding meaning in their education, "thus helping them find life" (Lee, 2007, p. 198), or self-actualization (Maslow, 1943).

Service learning is a useful tool that can be used in the effort to build connections, further learning and engagement with the curriculum, as well as improving the self-concept of Aboriginal students while acknowledging Aboriginal ways of knowing. Simply put, service learning "connects school-based curriculum with the inherent caring and concern young people have for their world" and connects classroom content, literature, and skills to community needs (Berger Kaye, 2004, p. 6-7). Through service learning students will "apply academic, social and personal skills to improve community; make decisions that have real, not hypothetical, results; grow as individuals, gain respect for peers, and increase civic participation; experience success no matter what their ability level; gain a deeper understanding of themselves, their community,

and society; (and) develop as leaders who take initiative, solve problems, work as a team, and demonstrate their abilities while, and through, helping others (Berger Kaye, 2004, p. 6-7).

Although this is not the only approach to meeting the needs of Aboriginal students, and must still be paired with the meaningful inclusion of Aboriginal content in all subject areas, service learning one of many useful tools that can be used in the effort to increase Aboriginal students' success in the education system as it can help them and others fulfil their hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943) as well as contribute, build relationships, develop confidence and self-worth, gain skills and experiences for the workplace, practice communication skills and see what their community has to offer outside of their immediate situation, all while experiencing, celebrating, and 'living' their Aboriginal culture. This is how true change happens: This is how Aboriginal students are successful.

"Each of us must realise the power and potential for change when just one individual armed with the right mind-set decides things can be better, and rejects absolutely the notion that second or third rate is good enough for Aboriginal children" (Sarra, 2007, p. 8)

Chapter Three: From Theory to Practice

Introduction

The First Peoples Principles of Learning (2013) form an important foundation for many of the teaching resources focused on the incorporation of Aboriginal content now available, but this project argues that the Principles can and should be a greater focus in our attempts to incorporate Aboriginal ways of knowing in our schools and classrooms.

The First Peoples Principles of Learning include the ideas that: “Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors; Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place); Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one’s actions; Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities; Learning recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge; Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story; Learning involves patience and time; Learning requires exploration of one’s identity; Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations” (FPPL, 2013). This project works to put these Principles into action. Too often they are overlooked but the opportunity to apply the First Peoples Principles of Learning through service-learning gives yet another entry-point for educators to take the important step of not only teaching Aboriginal content, but also about the ways of knowing that shape Aboriginal culture. Also referred to as academic service-learning, it is “an experiential learning pedagogy in which education is delivered by engaging students in community service that is integrated with the learning objectives of core academic curricula” (Furco, 2010). Researchers such as Kraft and Wheeler (2003), Scales, Roehlkepartain, et al. (2006), Tebes, Feinn, et al. (2007), and Clark (1988) have already made the connection between

service-learning and the improved success of struggling students. This project takes this idea further by looking at the potential to pull in the “push-outs” by putting the First Peoples Principles of Learning into action through service-learning. This chapter outlines this project as well as the rationale behind it, the process of its creation, the logistics and challenges of undertaking such a project, and the possible next-steps in regards to taking this project and its associated learning from theory to practice.

Overview

Upon completion of my Literature Review I sat with the idea of the most meaningful and straightforward way of improving my own practice and encourage my colleagues in regards to the implementation the First Peoples Principles of Learning in our classrooms and schools. We know that in successful integration of Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogical practices, teachers’ attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions about the changes have been identified as “the crucial factor that can make or break the innovation” (Kanu, 2005). Kanu’s (2005) data also shows that although there is openness on behalf of teachers to the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives in school curriculum, little progress is being made in the actual realization of this integration. There is often a ‘token’ commitment to integration, as shown through the additive and contributions approaches most commonly taken by teachers (Kanu, 2005). The “‘add and stir’ model of (integration of Aboriginal culture and content) does little to empower students and reconcile their position in society nor does it provide the needed foundation for students to find the awareness or means to overcome the root problems of their oppression” (Battiste & McLean, 2005, p. 7), yet this approach to the inclusion of Aboriginal content and culture is the one most often observed in schools today. Real implementation of the First Peoples Principles of Learning can and will only happen if it is straightforward, clearly laid out, and can slot in naturally with what teachers are already doing.

Successful implementation of quality innovation requires eight stages, as discussed by Fullan (2012), and they include focus, innovation, empathy, capacity building, contagion, transparency, elimination of non-essentials and leadership.

The focus stage stresses the need to focus on a small number of ambitious goals as too many can lead to unwanted and often costly “non-essentials” or “distractions.” These distractions present easy “outs” to teachers who are looking for them and confound people involved in implementation. Innovation, the second stage, requires some kind of new thought, backed by new knowledge. Fullan (2012) says that ideas that fail to embrace new knowledge can be dangerous, as it is often old methods merely repackaged. Third is empathy, and this is not as much about feelings so much as understanding why naysayers are saying no. They may have good reasons, often we hear things like “We have seen all this before,” or “When will we have the time?”. These reasons are valid and need to be addressed if educators are to buy in. If these concerns are dismissed, the group becomes alienated and momentum is quashed.

Professional capital is the next stage, and it refers to the power and synergy of the group. Fullan (2012) repeats that not only do students not learn on their own, teachers won’t either, and therefore collaboration and a strong community of learners is imperative. Stage five, capacity building, consists of constant learning and development. Accountability is threaded through all of these stages and comes naturally when peers work together. When educators on the level ground work together it doesn’t feel like direct pressure. This is different from pressure from the top, as this kind of oppressive pressure which may come from school boards, ministries or school based administrators, can be very uninspiring and stifling. That is why horizontal connectedness is key, and why educational leaders who are not administrators have a huge role to play in bringing innovation to schools and to the larger education systems.

This leads to the creation of a website that will act as a handbook for the integration of Indigenous ways of knowing into the classroom through service learning. The information offered through the website was gathered from a number of sources including School District websites, resource packages created by a number of Aboriginal organizations, the Reconciliation Through Indigenous Education course offered by the University of British Columbia, suggestions offered through conversations with colleagues and Elders, the Ministry of Education, and academic articles found through my Literature Review, and the website will continue to grow, evolve and respond to the needs of our community, as it is a ‘living document’. This was all done with the clear intention to make it as meaningful and accessible as possible, acknowledging the stages of implementation outlined above, as well as the First Peoples Principles of Learning, which state that “learning involves patience and time” (FPPL, 2013).

In an effort to manifest the First Peoples Principles of Learning in this very project, it attempts to ultimately support the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors, as well as to be holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place), and recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge (FPPL, 2013). The literature review and completion of the final product of this project was conducted through reading, conversation, observation, and reflection, which reflects that “learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge [and]... is embedded in memory, history, and story” (FPPL, 2013) as much as in articles, academic journals, and professional development handbooks. The end result is designed to lead teachers and schools through the process of putting the First Peoples Principles of Learning into action through service learning.

Rationale

The decision to focus on this topic, in this way, is justified by the review of the literature. The state of Aboriginal education is not only one of interest here in British Columbia or Canada, it is a topic of interest world-wide as the rights of Indigenous Peoples are realised and highlighted by movements such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples . There are many perspectives and a plethora of articles to be read, and there are recurring themes around what we know Aboriginal students need in order to be successful. Williams (2008) states that enhancing the learning of First Nations, Métis and Inuit learners is about restoration, collaboration, visibility and acknowledgement, and positive force.

Also, the new British Columbian curriculum, soon to be mandated by legislation, has made a great effort to include both Aboriginal content as well and concepts throughout Kindergarten to Grade 9. It is no longer a matter of choice for educators to include the First Peoples Principles of Learning or Aboriginal Ways of Knowing into their classrooms, as these approaches to thinking and learning, as well as content areas are now more deeply integrated into all areas of the curriculum.

As shown in Tait's (2011) Aboriginal Understandings Learning Progression, there are many stages of development in both teachers' and students' beliefs and attitudes towards Aboriginal Peoples, as well as knowledge of Aboriginal Peoples and history on local, regional and national levels. Application of the First Peoples Principles of Learning encourages all involved in education to move through the progression, from wherever they may be situated all the way to action and advocacy. The "journey into deeper waters" as described in the figure below, is not always an easy one as it not only takes time, resources and dedication, but also requires a willingness to address one's own understandings and beliefs (Tait, 2011). Just as

stated in the First Peoples Principles of Learning, and manifested in this project, “learning required exploration of one’s identity” (FPPL, 2013).

The intention and rationale behind this project was to create something that was easily accessible for any and all who were interested in furthering their journey in Aboriginal education, that did not require immense background knowledge and encouraged both myself and my colleagues to move towards action and advocacy through the application of the First Peoples Principles of Learning. Also, the decision to link Aboriginal Ways of Knowing to the curriculum in a new way was intentional, as this once again may be the link that will make this important topic inviting and accessible to those who may not have felt it was in the past.

Aboriginal Understandings Learning Progression


	<i>Moving Toward the Water</i>	<i>Boarding the Canoe</i>	<i>Raising your Paddle</i>	<i>Journey Into Deeper Waters</i>
	Awareness implies a sense of ‘need to know’	Developing implies a willingness to address one’s own understandings and beliefs	Acquiring implies a demonstration of knowledge and respect	Action/ Advocacy implies a demonstration of knowledge, respect and a commitment to advocacy
Beliefs and Attitudes towards Aboriginal Peoples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizes that knowledge may need to be enhanced Aware that issues exist around Aboriginal peoples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates a willingness to enhance one’s knowledge and understanding May bring an informed perspective to current issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates a responsibility to enhance one’s knowledge and understanding Possesses an intention to bring an informed and critical perspective to current issues and acts upon those intentions Demonstrates respect for Aboriginal people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides leadership to enhance others’ knowledge and understanding Seeks out opportunities to act on the injustices toward Aboriginal people
Knowledge of Aboriginal Peoples and History on local, regional and national levels	Demonstrates awareness of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Aboriginal peoples and territories Aboriginal languages and cultures Indigenous Knowledge Canadian history as it pertains to Aboriginal people 	Beginning to explore the topics of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Aboriginal peoples and territories Aboriginal languages and cultures Indigenous Knowledge History and the impact of colonization the impact of the Indian Act on present day Aboriginal people the contributions of Aboriginal people to contemporary society 	Demonstrates knowledge of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Aboriginal peoples and territories Aboriginal languages and cultures Indigenous Knowledge History and the impact of colonization the impact of the Indian Act on present day Aboriginal people the contributions of Aboriginal people to contemporary society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizes the influence of the dominant culture, while striving to foster the Aboriginal Worldview Demonstrates and practices a knowledge and respect for Indigenous Pedagogy

Figure 3. Aboriginal Understandings Learning Progression (Tait, 2011)

The decision to create a website rather than a ring bound booklet or pamphlet, for example, was to allow the product of my studies to be ‘living’, or ever evolving. In an effort for this very project to reflect the First Peoples Principles of Learning, with a focus on the first two points, the website is publically accessible and will grow and evolve in a reflexive manner. It is important to note that the Principles include the ideas that: “Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors, [and that] learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)” (FPPL, 2013). The topic, design and implementation of this project are all rationalised by an effort to reflect these two key points from the First Peoples Principles of Learning. A website, rather than a printed document for example, allows this project to reflect the needs of the community as they change, as well as for others to contribute to what is shared on it, and allow for relationships and reflection to guide and ensure its constant growth and development.

Website Creation

The process of learning to create and maintain a website began during my Bachelor of Education, and was furthered during the Technology course that was a part of this Master’s program. Our School District uses a web platform called SharePoint, which is offered by Scholantis, and I chose to use this platform for a number of reasons. First of all, I had created and maintain my classroom website already and am therefore familiar with the basics of the layout, web parts, functionality and updates. Also, there are regular professional development opportunities within our School District, as well as the constant offer of one-on-one support from the Information Technology Teacher Leader.

Not to be underestimated was the importance of knowing that any website I created would be housed on a local server, right here in our community. The capacity to house it in-District means it is a secure platform and that any information I share meets the privacy requirements outlined by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act here in British Columbia. In addition, the fact that I can maintain it as a private site which viewers need to be invited to see or open it up to all staff in our District, or, if I choose, to make it public and searchable through the worldwide Web also made the decision to create this type of website much easier.

The basic template of all SharePoint websites is the same, and offer limited opportunities to personalize. Below is the Home Page of the basic template I began my project with, followed by the Home Page of my project in its final stages.

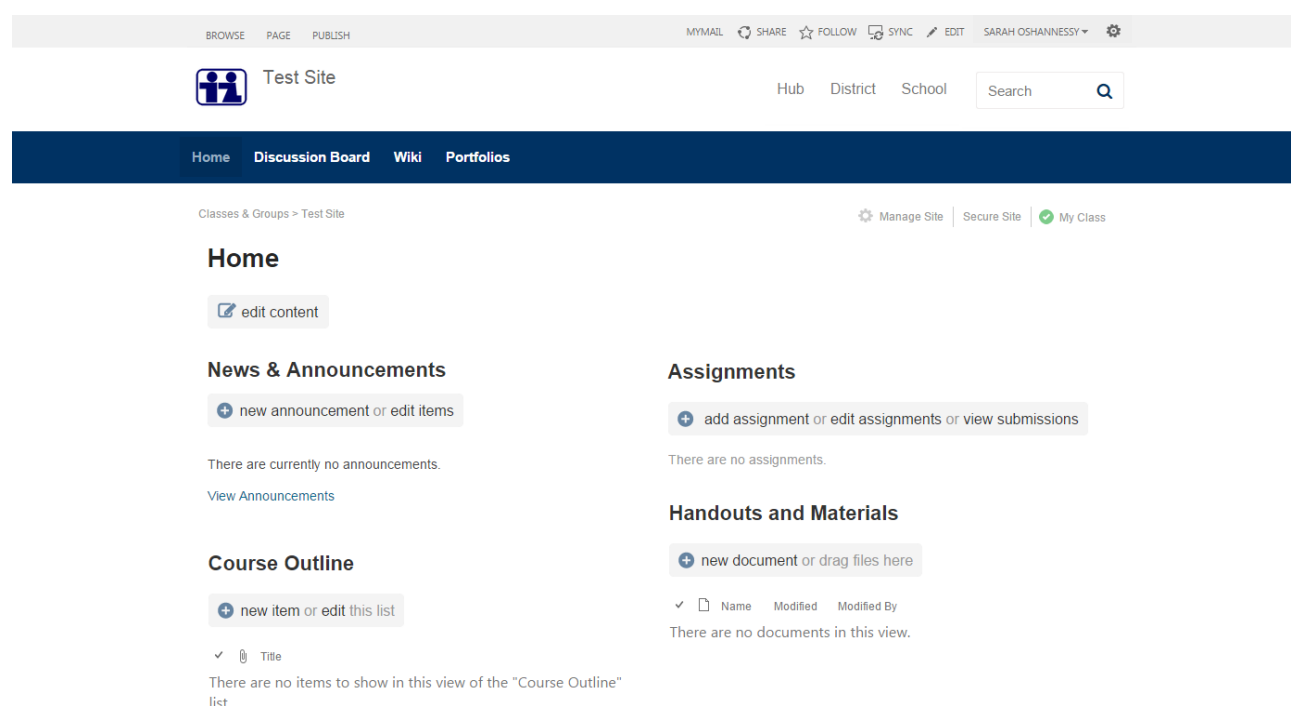


Figure 4. SharePoint Template

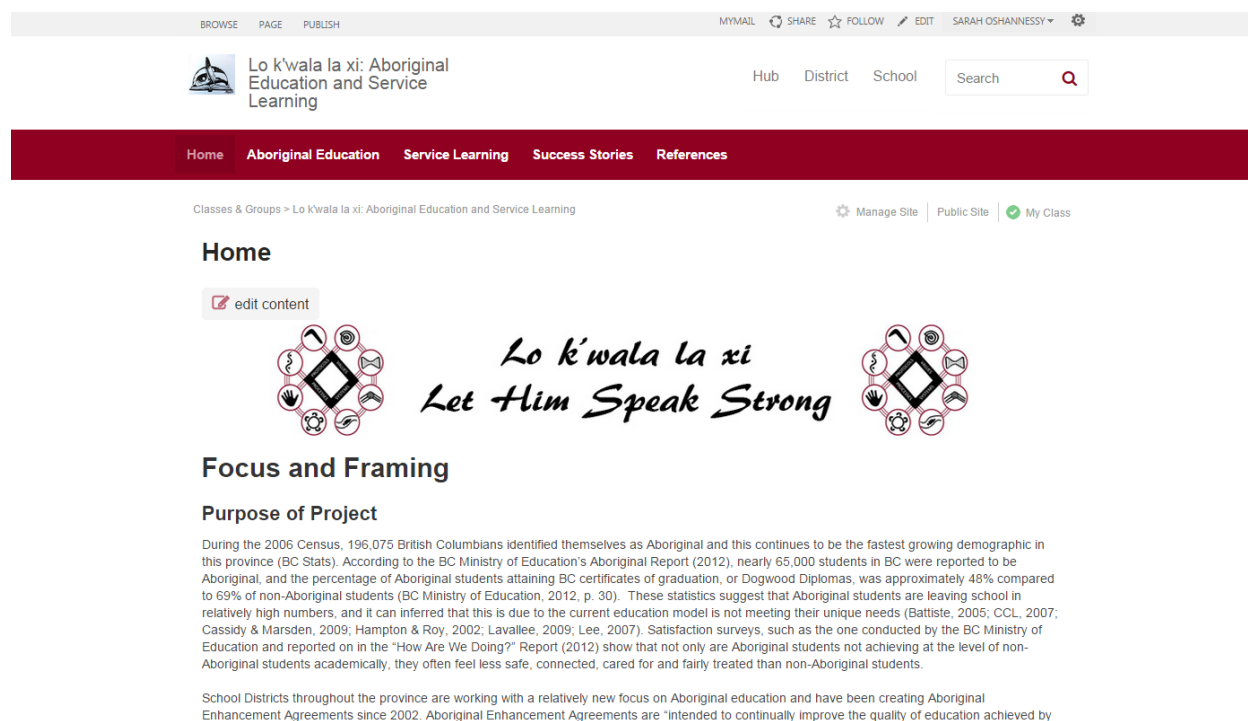


Figure 5. Project: Homepage

Steps to make the page as aesthetically pleasing as possible were important to me, and included adjustments to the colour scheme, the addition of a banner, and reducing the amount of clutter on each page. Working through the large amount of web parts available was not always easy, but collaboration with peers assisted me to not only talk through my ideas but also bring them together in an easy to navigate, informative website.

I put great effort into trying to include various types of mediums (video, illustrations, lists, and articles) in order to make the information shared relevant, accessible, and interesting. Users of this resource can delve as deeply as they would like to into the subject area, as there are many entry points. The figure below shows the various mediums used to share information on a page, for example.

Lo Kwaile is at: Aboriginal Education and Service Learning

Home Aboriginal Education Service Learning Success Stories References

Classes & Groups » Lo Kwaile is at: Aboriginal Education and Service Learning

Manage Site Public Site My Class

Aboriginal Education

Establishing a Cultural Context for Learning

What is Reconciliation from TRC - CVM

What is Reconciliation from TRC - CVM on Vimeo

First Peoples Principles of Learning

Click HERE for a printable version of the First Peoples Principles of Learning

Education Enhancement Agreement

Click HERE to view the most recent Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement (for SGT2)

Resources

Click HERE to view the SGT2 Aboriginal Education website (including resource catalogues and contacts)

Click HERE to view the SGT2 Aboriginal Education Handbook

Click HERE for the BC First Peoples Learning Resources - Books for Use in K-7 Classrooms

Click HERE for In Our Own Words: Bringing Authentic First Peoples Content to the K-3 Classroom

Click HERE to access the Reclaiming Youth website

Click HERE for an annotated bibliography of resources focused on Indigenous Education Through the Lens of Reconciliation

Click HERE for an annotated bibliography of resources focused on the History of Indigenous Education

Figure 6. Project: Example of Page

Logistics and Challenges

As mentioned above, navigating the technology in order to create this product was not always easy, but because of the supports available here, in the School District, these challenges were not insurmountable. A greater challenge was paring down the information that I could share

through the website into a collection of the most meaningful, easy to navigate, informative pieces. As the overall goal of my project was to create a resource that would assist both myself and my colleagues to apply the First Peoples Principles of Learning into our practice, I knew there could be no extraneous content presented in my product. For this reason there are not many pages on my site, as shown in the banner included below:

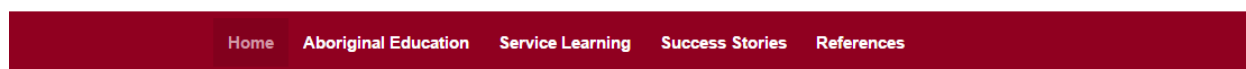


Figure 7. Project: Banner

From there, each page contains a brief overview of what can be found on the individual page, as well as the most pertinent information on the topic. Both the Aboriginal Education page and the Service Learning page contain a list of resources that focus specifically on the topic, and offer links to website, articles, resource pages, and the like. The figure below shows an example from the Aboriginal Education page. As this webpage is a living document the list of resources are ever growing and evolving and this screenshot is from March 2015. The ever growing and changing nature of the website was created in an effort to manifest the First Peoples Principles of Learning, with a particular focus on the ideas that “learning involves patience and time” and that it is “holistic, reflexive, [and] reflective” (FPPL, 2013).

Resources

Click [HERE](#) to view the **SD72 Aboriginal Education website (including resource catalogues and contacts)**

Click [HERE](#) to view the **SD72 Aboriginal Education Handbook**

Click [HERE](#) for the **BC First Peoples Learning Resources - Books for Use in K-7 Classrooms**

Click [HERE](#) for **In Our Own Words: Bringing Authentic First Peoples Content to the K-3 Classroom**

Click [HERE](#) to access the **Reclaiming Youth** at website

Click [HERE](#) for an annotated bibliography of resources focused on **Indigenous Education Through the Lens of Reconciliation**

Click [HERE](#) for an annotated bibliography of resources focused on the **History of Indigenous Education**

Figure 8. Project: Example of Resources

Another logistical challenge was presented by the updates our District was doing to its server and the updates Scholantis was doing to SharePoint during the time this website was created. As is often the case, these updates were not completed on time, and the communication about the delays was not always as clear as it could have been. Therefore, some of the work I had completed was lost in the update and web parts were not always functioning in the way they were supposed to while bugs were worked out. I quickly learned to create any larger pieces of writing in a Word Document and to save it to my computer rather than depending of the web server to save everything eternally. This also helped me to work through editing my thoughts and in getting them to be as concise as possible, so there were some benefits to what was sometimes a great frustration.

From Theory to Practice: Possible Next Steps

Throughout the process of creating this website I have been in contact with District leaders in the areas of Aboriginal Education, technology, and professional development. The intention behind this was to ensure that what I was working on was meaningful and had an application beyond my own personal use. By not only researching what is needed in Aboriginal Education, but also communicating with those working in this area on a day-to-day basis, I have been able to create something that I believe contributes to my profession, at a local level and possibly even beyond.

For example, the possibility of being able to offer professional development sessions to my colleagues is a very real one, and conversations have already started with the Principle of Aboriginal Education as well as the Assistant Superintendent in regards to what they may look like and how my website could possibly be a part of Aboriginal Education in the District.

Overall the opportunity to delve deeper into an area of passion has helped me to grow both personally and professionally. As stated above, although combining the First Peoples Principles of Learning and service learning is not the only approach to meeting the needs of Aboriginal students, and must still be paired with the meaningful inclusion of Aboriginal content in all subject areas, service learning is one of many useful tools that can be used in the effort to increase Aboriginal students' success in the education system. This is one approach to making true change happen, and I believe my project and the product of it will contribute to the success of teachers' and students' "journey into deeper waters" (Tait, 2011).

Conclusion

In an effort to reflect the First Peoples Principles of Learning in this very project, it has been created with the intention to ultimately support the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors, as well as be holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place), and will recognize the role of indigenous knowledge (FPPL, 2013). The completion of the final product of this project has been conducted through reading, conversation, observation, and reflection. The end result of the website designed to lead teachers and schools through the process of putting the First Peoples Principles of Learning into action through service-learning was the product of much research into professional development, the implementation of change and specifically Aboriginal ways of knowing into the education system, and continued attempts to not only apply the First Peoples Principle of Learning in my own practice, but also to embody them.

The following chapter will succinctly summarize my project and reflect upon the aspects of my professional thinking, beliefs, intentions or activity that have changed and those aspects

which have been reinforced as the result of my experiences throughout my Master in Education program. Also, the chapter will address how I anticipate my graduate experience will affect my professional career and in which ways I anticipate my graduate experience will affect my colleagues, school and District. This chapter will conclude with three key recommendations for other educators who may be interested in engaging with this project topic.

Chapter 4: Comprehensive Exam

Introduction

This chapter summarizes my project and reflects upon the aspects of my professional thinking, beliefs, intentions and activity that have changed and/or been reinforced as the result of my experiences throughout my Masters in Education program. It will also address how I anticipate my graduate experience will affect my professional career and in which ways I anticipate my graduate experience will affect my colleagues, school and District. This chapter concludes with three key recommendations for other educators who may be interested in engaging with this project topic. This chapter takes into account not only the process of completing my final project, but the entirety of my Masters in Education program.

Summary of Project

The final project I have completed to meet the requirements of the Masters in Education program is focused on Aboriginal Education. I began with a brief overview of the history of our Aboriginal peoples and the education system as well as a snapshot my motivations for choosing this topic. Next I thoroughly reviewed the literature in an effort to better understand what Aboriginal students need in order to be successful, as well as what factors often influence teachers' ability and/or willingness to begin to include both Aboriginal content and ways of knowing into their practice.

This review of the literature resulted in the creation of a website that is designed to act as a handbook of sorts, offering information about Aboriginal Education and ways to apply the First Peoples Principle of Learning in a meaningful way, using service learning. The entire project has strived to reflect the First Peoples Principles of Learning, and has deeply affected me both personally and professionally.

Changes and Reinforcements

Aspects of my professional thinking, beliefs, intentions and activity have both changed and been reinforced as a result of my experiences throughout my Masters in Education program. The courses and subsequent assignments, conversations, and reflections, as well as the completion of this final project reinforced my passion for Aboriginal Education. Somehow I had lost my way a little, and forgot that it was Aboriginal Education that drew me to a career in education in the first place, and the opportunities that becoming a student again provided me brought me back to my original passion. The course in Indigenous Education, as well as the process of deciding on a focus for my final project reinforced my professional thinking and beliefs in regards to the importance of not only integrating Aboriginal content and histories into our classrooms, but also the value of including Aboriginal ways of knowing into my teaching practice and the environment I create in my classroom. My intentions and activities as a teacher in my community have become an illustration of these reinforced aspects of my thinking, beliefs and intentions. How I carry myself, how I communicate, as well as how I spend my time (such as volunteering at one of our 'inner city' schools with a population of over 80% Aboriginal students, or applying for Aboriginal Education positions within our District), are all shaped by my reinforced passion for Aboriginal Education.

The most notable changes to my professional thinking, beliefs, intentions or activity as a result of my experiences throughout my Masters in Education program would include my courage and willingness to be honest with myself and my colleagues in terms of the need to mindfully include Aboriginal content and culture into our practice. Especially in a District like ours, when faced with the statistics that we know are a reality in our schools, we cannot continue to do the same things and expect not only different, but better things. Laura Tait's Learning

Progression, referenced in both Chapter 2 and 3, has helped to remind me of the meaningful growth I have undergone so far in regards to my contributions to reconciliation through Aboriginal education, but also reminded me of what more I need to do as an individual as well as a member of this profession in order to see that continued movement to the right. If we are to “journey into deeper waters,” and move to a place of action and advocacy then we need to “provide leadership to enhance others’ knowledge and understanding, seek out opportunities to act on the injustices towards Aboriginal peoples,” as well as “recognize[s] the influence of the dominant culture, while striving to foster Aboriginal Worldview [and] demonstrate[s] and practice a knowledge and respect for Indigenous Pedagogy” (Tait, 2011). I have worked hard to begin my journey into the deeper waters around me, and am deeply grateful for the encouragement to make meaningful changes to my professional thinking, beliefs, intentions and activities that are the result of my experiences throughout my Masters in Education program.

Anticipated Affect

There are many anticipated affects in regards to my professional career, as a result of my graduate experience. Most notably, my renewed passion in Aboriginal Education has already prompted me to apply for a transfer into an English Skills Development and/or Aboriginal Support role, and to clearly express my desire to work in this very important area of education within my District. Completing this graduate program has also prompted me to begin to volunteer at a local school which services the students in our community with the greatest needs, as well as to actively collaborate with my peers throughout the District. The consequences associated with this new direction and clarity in my professional desires are still unclear, but can be anticipated to be positive and a move to better align my personal thinking, beliefs, intentions and activity with the same aspects of my professional life.

I anticipate my graduate experience will affect my colleagues, school and District as I am already working closely with colleagues, the Professional Development department, Principal of Aboriginal Education, and the Assistant Superintendent in not as I worked through the requires of the program and final project, but also looking forward to personal and professional opportunism for growth and ways to share what I have learned. Offering professional development workshops here in my District is an immediate next step I see happening, and these workshops will directly affect my colleagues, school and District. As I was reminded in my studies, teachers need multiple entry points in which to access Aboriginal content and to begin to apply the First Peoples Principals of Learning in their classrooms and practice. My website and related Professional Development sessions have all been created with this in mind, and therefore I anticipate they will have a positive effect on my colleagues, school and District.

Recommendations

Through the process of completing my final project I have reflected on three key recommendations I would offer other educators who may be interested in engaging in a similar project topic. First and foremost, move beyond fear and guilt. Being afraid of saying the wrong thing, of appropriation, of being called a racist, of overstepping ones' bounds, holds us back from making meaningful change through meaningful learning. Fear is a real and often debilitating emotion, it must be acknowledged and I think it is appropriate to be a little unsure when venturing into "deeper water," but do not let this stop you from taking the plunge. The same goes for guilt. As we begin to understand what we think we know about Aboriginal peoples and how to come to know these things, let alone to contemplate our own histories, guilt can be overwhelming. Once again, do not let this very powerful emotion stop you from engaging in this

topic. Aboriginal Education is not only the responsibility of all of us, it is a vehicle of true reconciliation. The application of Aboriginal ways of knowing as well as the teaching of content about our shared past, present and futures benefits all involved. Be brave, take risks, acknowledge the emotions that surface during your journey with this topic but do not let them stop you.

Furthermore, move forward using the First Peoples Principles of Learning. Collaborate, communicate and reflect. Learning from your colleagues and community members by taking the time to not only read what the academic world has to offer on the topic, but also by spending time in classrooms, programs, with those who work in the area in all capacities, just sitting with Aboriginal learners. Attempt to ultimately support the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors, as well as to be holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place), and recognize the role of Indigenous knowledge (FPPL, 2013) in every step of your learning on this project topic.

Finally, use Tait's (2011) learning progression as a 'north star' as you move through the topic. As stated above, if we are to "journey into deeper waters," and move to a place of action and advocacy then we need to "provide leadership to enhance others' knowledge and understanding, seek out opportunities to act on the injustices towards Aboriginal peoples," as well as "recognize[s] the influence of the dominant culture, while striving to foster Aboriginal Worldview [and] demonstrate and practice a knowledge and respect for Indigenous Pedagogy" (Tait, 2011). Utilize a growth mindset, as outlined by Dweck (2007) to continue to believe that your abilities and impact can be developed through dedication and hard work, and that this dedication and hard work can affect change in others too. This view creates a love of learning

and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment, and virtually all great people have had these qualities (Dweck, 2007).

Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the questions outlined by the Faculty of Graduate Studies in Curriculum and Instruction, and has fulfilled the requirements of the required comprehensive exam. It has succinctly summarized my project and reflected upon the aspects of my professional thinking, beliefs, intentions and activity that have changed and those that have been reinforced as a result of my experiences throughout my Masters in Education program, as well as how I anticipate my graduate experience will affect my professional career. The chapter has also addressed the ways in which I anticipate my graduate experience will affect my colleagues, school and District. In conclusion, this chapter offers three key recommendations for other educators who may be interested in engaging with this project topic.

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