

# Indigenizing BC Education: a Collective Responsibility

Why ALL educators need to take responsibility for Indigenizing education

This project was supported by the Jamie Cassels Undergraduate Research Award and was supervised by Kathy Sanford of the faculty of Education

## My Positionality

I am a settler of primarily British descent on the lands of the Lekwungen-speaking peoples, specifically the Songhees and Esquimalt nations. I am very thankful to call this part of the world home. I particularly appreciate the mild winters and good hiking opportunities. I am showing my thanks by working towards reconciliation in my personal and professional life.

## Methods

This project was created using a combination of a literature review, personal experiences, and conversations with practicing teachers and fellow students in the Faculty of Education.

## It's Part of the Job

### The 94 Calls to Action:

Seven of the TRC's 94 calls to action are about our education system. None of the seven have been completed yet, but we are responsible for seeing them through.

### Standard Nine:

Standard nine of the BC Teacher's professional standards states, "Educators respect and value the history of First Nations, Inuit and Métis in Canada and the impact of the past on the present and the future. Educators contribute towards truth, reconciliation and healing. Educators foster a deeper understanding of ways of knowing and being, histories, and cultures of First Nations, Inuit and Métis."

### UNDRIP:

BC has become the first province to accept the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People. Article 14 of UNDRIP states, "Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning."

### School District Strategic Plans

Many school districts, including all the Victoria area districts, have adopted strategic plans that call for increasing the amount of Indigenous content in school and addressing the gap in academic success between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in BC.

## Introduction/Goals

While BC's education system is deeply rooted in European colonialism both at the K-12 and the post-secondary levels, there is acknowledgement from individuals and institutions that Indigenous content and pedagogy must be incorporated. However, considering BC's education system remains predominantly run and staffed by non-Indigenous people, non-Indigenous educators have a lot of work to do to integrate Indigenous education. My goal with this project is to highlight the personal and social benefits of this work and to discuss some of the difficulties that come up when non-Indigenous educators Indigenize their classrooms.



The WSANEC Leadership School is located on the Tsartlip Reserve near Saanichton, BC. While an excellent opportunity for its students, the reality is most Indigenous youth will be taught by non-Indigenous educators.

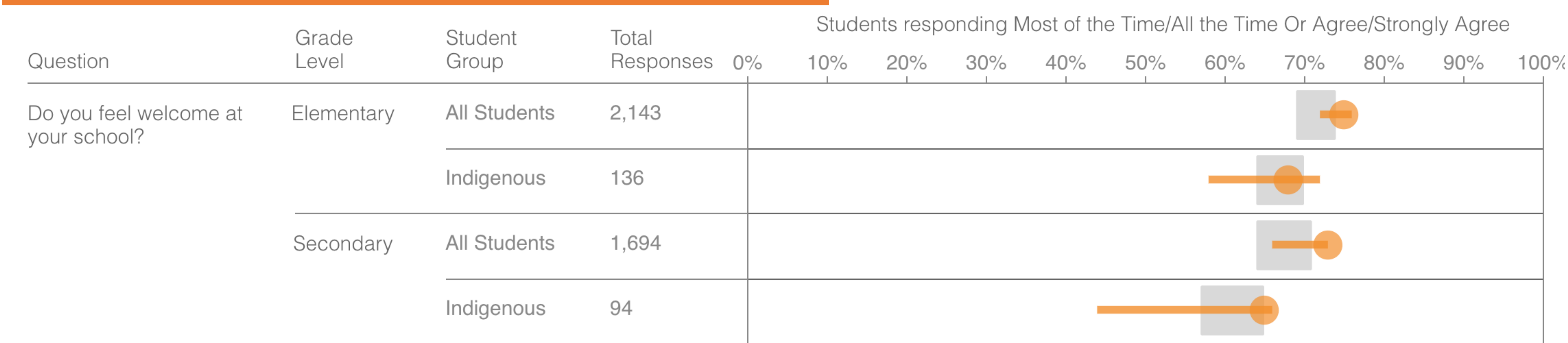
## Ideas for Indigenizing the Classroom

1. Create strong and **personalized** land acknowledgements. This can be individual or one for the whole class.
2. Focus on local subject matter.
3. Make a point of following local protocols or traditions. For example, it's customary in Lekwungen communities to organize discussions by passing a stone to the right.

## Benefits for Students

Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and educators have much to gain from Indigenization. Efforts to Indigenize education in BC have coincided with modest improvements in Indigenous learner success and greater feelings of welcomeness in schools. From my experience, I have seen firsthand that Indigenizing content can lead to better attitudes toward Indigenous people and a greater sense of being understood by Indigenous students. Learning about the treaty process and nation-to-nation agreements was an opportunity to clear up many common misconceptions about Indigenous people. Finally, learning and teaching this content has enriched my life and understanding of my place in the world.

## Student Feelings of Welcomeness School District 61 (Greater Victoria)



This graph shows the percentage of students who report feeling welcome at their school, and the line represents the range of answers from the previous five years. While a gap remains, this is evidence that the school districts, the BC ministry of education, and its Indigenous partners' work to Indigenize education over the past five years is making a difference. We must recognize tangible signs that our work is making progress while also being mindful that we cannot be complacent. School districts 63 (Saanich) and 62 (Sooke) also show progress. I am interested and hopeful to see what effect this improvement in self-reported "feelings of welcomeness" means for the academic achievement gap.

Data from Gov.bc.ca/B.C. Education System Performance

## Best Practices

1. Research and have a good understanding of the Indigenous content you are teaching.
2. Indigenous students' contributions are valuable but don't view them as an unlimited source of information.
3. Admit if you don't know the answer to a question and find out.
4. Work Indigenous content into your classroom traditions.

## The Fear of Making Mistakes

A big part of why I wanted to do this project was to discuss the fear that many non-Indigenous educators have about teaching Indigenous content. I know from personal experience that many educators are afraid of saying the wrong thing or not knowing enough. A participant in Emily Root's 2010 study put it, "Is this appropriate?" or "Should I even say this?" and, "If I say this, am I really illustrating my ignorance or am I being insensitive or insulting" (Root 2010). It takes bravery to begin this journey. Just as we tell our students, you must be willing to make mistakes to learn. If you get something wrong, learn, correct and get it right next time. The easiest path is to keep doing what we've always been doing. However, reconciliation calls for us to do more. If we don't try, we all miss out on so much.

## References/ Further Reading

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