Aboriginal Worldviews and Perspectives in the Classroom

Moving Forward

Ted Cadwallader
Provincial Director
Aboriginal Education, Learning Division
BC Ministry of Education
Contents

- Process
- Resource Guide
- Example Practices
- Further Resources
- Next Step Questions
Process

• Inspired by Scott Benwell and Kaleb Child from SD 85
  • SD 85 (Vancouver Island North)
  • SD 41 (Burnaby)
  • SD 5 (Cranbrook)
  • SD 27 (Cariboo Chilcotin)
  • SD 23 (Kelowna)
• First Nations, Métis and School District leaders, teachers, support staff, students, post-secondary institutes and agency partners during public gatherings:
Opening Remarks

• Community Chiefs, Elders, and members welcomed participants with traditional greetings
Working Sessions

- Discussion occurred in three sessions guided by a particular set of focus questions
Working Sessions

A Focus on Aboriginal Worldviews and Perspectives
• What are the characteristics of Aboriginal worldviews and perspectives?

Content and the Classroom
• How do we ensure that Aboriginal worldviews and perspectives are embedded into practice?
• How do we engage and inspire Aboriginal learners?

Evidence of Success
• How will we know we are meeting the needs of all Aboriginal learners? What is the evidence? How does it look and feel?
Gathering Information

- Answers were recorded in blog posts, and then formalized with handwritten summaries and archived by the facilitation team.
- Twitter feed using the tag #BCAb Talks.
“A teacher who believes the students are capable of excellence, and can achieve it if properly engaged, will work wonders.”
Resource Guide

• Created to build upon regional dialogue and share findings with educators
• Embracing the “if not here, where?” mindset, this project seeks to encourage strategies and clear commitments from all educators
• Provides support for teachers to introduce the new curriculum
Themes

Characteristics of Aboriginal Worldviews and Perspectives

- Emphasis on Identity
- Engagement with the Land, Nature, the Outdoors
- Local Focus
- Awareness of History
- The Role of the Teacher
- Community Engagement
- Teacher Preparation

Connectedness and Relationship

- Community Involvement: Process & Protocols
- The Power of Story
- Traditional Teaching
- Language and Culture
- Experiential Learning
- Learning Environment and Resources
- Flexibility (scheduling, program/course configuration, grouping)
- Leadership and Staffing
- A Positive, Learner-Centred Approach

Attributes of Responsive Schooling
Themes

Characteristics of Aboriginal Worldviews and Perspectives

Community Involvement: Process & Protocols

Emphasis on Identity

Engagement with the Land, Nature, the Outdoors

Local Focus

Awarness of History

Connectedness and Relationship

The Power of Story

Traditional Teaching

Language and Culture

Experiential Learning
Awareness of History

• Avoid reliance on colonial-era secondary sources for explanations involving Aboriginal peoples, where possible, use contemporary sources created by or with the involvement of Aboriginal contributors.
Awareness of History

“Aboriginal worldview is a way of thinking about the world. Perspective comes from learning and experience. The two are interconnected...”

“The knowledge keepers who understand the protocols need to be the ones writing, leading, defining the curriculum to be learned: Nothing about us, without us.”
Local Focus

• Look for opportunities to incorporate place-based learning into your practice (a focus on local Aboriginal history, experience stories, imagery, ecology).
Local Focus

“Place-based education...these names have been there for generations and reflect our sense of connectedness to the environment. The Ktunaxa name for Sparwood, for example, means ‘special place on the river’ and evokes our links and connections to the river. Just as its waters come from the surrounding creeks and streams and flow on to eventually feed into the Columbia River, so they connect people to one another.”
Emphasis on Identity

- Encourage student self-awareness grounded in knowledge of family origins, cultural background, place of origin, and other identity “markers.” Student self-expression is an opportunity to address and revisit this theme at various stages during their K-12 schooling.
Emphasis on Identity

“To better represent Aboriginal perspectives in the classroom, education needs to help people understand their roots, their culture – encourage the identity journey.”
Themes

- The Role of the Teacher
- Community Engagement
- Teacher Preparation
- A Positive, Learner-Centred Approach
- Attributes of Responsive Schooling
- Learning Environment and Resources
- Flexibility (scheduling, program/course configuration, grouping)
- Leadership and Staffing
The Role of the Teacher

• The teacher has an important role in contributing to truth, reconciliation, and healing.
The Role of the Teacher

“Racism is a major challenge. Overcome this by being courageous and relentless in addressing it, identifying it when we see it, and teaching our children well. Model a better way to behave, take individual responsibility to improve self and the area around you. Address racism through cultural teachings of respect, patience, and self-regulation.”
Teacher Preparation

• Teachers require relevant and reliable information about Aboriginal education in order to confidently engage with Aboriginal worldviews and perspectives.
  • For example, many participants suggested that educators take a local language course to become familiar with Aboriginal dialect and way of life.
Teacher Preparation

“Look at ways to provide professional development that builds on prior efforts to raise awareness, support students, and give tools to teachers...It can’t be a one-off; it has to be continuous and systemic. One of the most obvious results will be a reduction of racism and more acceptance of Aboriginal people across society.”

“As [teachers] begin incorporating Aboriginal perspectives and characteristics into their knowledge base and their practice, it will allow them to feel more comfortable and confident in their abilities to engage with Aboriginal perspectives, get past the fear of making mistakes, consult with others to become increasingly knowledgeable, and ask questions.”
A Positive, Learner-Centred Approach

“In the classroom, making space for Aboriginal voice involves patience and time...Trust building is critical, and this in turn requires educators to know and be sensitive to the individual student’s personal circumstances...Solutions such as peer support networks, student services, and specialized staff may be needed.” (SD 5)
Leadership and Staffing

• The leadership role includes:
  – Raising the level of attention paid to Aboriginal Education
  – Recognizing the role and potential associated with Aboriginal support workers and engaging them more deliberately in the delivery of education.
Leadership and Staffing

“Leadership is needed to move educators away from the fear of making a mistake – saying something offensive or getting involved in discussing things you do not understand. If we want our students to be risk-takers, we need to be risk-takers too.”
Indicators of Success

• We’ll know we’re successful when:
  • We see increased numbers of non-Indigenous people taking direct personal responsibility for their own decolonization and reconciliation
  • When any Indigenous person who has an education doesn’t feel obligated to fight for the rights of Indigenous people
  • When teachers see the relevance of Aboriginal knowledge, and when kids believe in themselves and are confident learners
Indicators of Success

• The voice of youth (including Aboriginal youth) is present and heard as part of district educational decision making

• We see decision makers in community and in school districts recognizing that they have a role in reconciliation and making decisions with this as a fundamental consideration

• We no longer have “Aboriginal curriculum” and other curriculum – we just have curriculum
Indicators of Success

• Indigenous languages are heard on school announcements and at celebrations, and seen on newsletters and the school website

• The values underlined in district Enhancement Agreements guide educators’ work with all students

• Teachers regularly ask for and receive professional development and support in Aboriginal education

• Students’ own ideas of success are taken into account
Every learner graduates with dignity, purpose, and options of what they are going to do next.

Aboriginal students all take visible pride in their culture.
Suggestions

“Making space for Aboriginal voice involves developing safe and caring environments and having actual physical spaces to meet and hang out. It also involves students knowing where the space is and accessing it.” (SD 27)

“Recognizing Aboriginal place names and posting indigenous-language welcome signs in the school are easy first steps in bringing the language into schools.” (SD 5)

“Having an Elder in meetings with children will change the attitude of the children.” (SD 27)

“The linear timetable is not structured to allow for learning in an Indigenous way. It doesn’t allow for deeper exploration of things that students may be passionate about learning.” (SD 23)
Resources

• Access this resource guide
  ➢ https://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/awp_moving_forward.pdf

• Ministry-produced learning resources and curriculum materials
  ➢ www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/documents.htm

• FNESC documents and videos
  ➢ www.fnesc.ca/resources

• Network of Innovation and Inquiry

• Innovation Inventory
  ➢ www.k12innovation.ca
Co-operative Reflection on Practice

• On-going professional development
• Bring together colleagues to ponder collective action through staff meetings and/or special-purpose “mini-gatherings”
Thank You

“Students should graduate with an understanding of what they can do to be a part of reconciliation.”

— Joe Pierre Jr., Ktunaxa Knowledge Keeper