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A Sense of Belonging

>> To create a sense of belonging, identity, and culture in the classroom or even in the system, in the curriculum, what a lot of educators will say in native education is two things. One, students need to see themselves. Like, they need to see a teacher who is like them because right now they don't. It's not, the system isn't as diverse as it could be, and this is why I think First Nations School generally will try to hire First Nations people that, I mean, that's not to exclude others, but they need to see themselves because you're looking at a curriculum that doesn't really, you know, recognize your reality, or your reality is represented in a way that isn't how you understand it. So that's what a lot of universities, a lot of, you know, education, educators are trying to do. You know, First Nation or aboriginal communities that have got self-government or negotiated or comprehensive land claims, that's what they try to do. Establish systems where students are going to see themselves. They also need to see themselves in the curriculum in a positive and constructive way as opposed to the kind of way I saw myself in the curriculum when I was in Grade Six, and I was a savage, and, you know, the Grade Six curriculum, whatever, thirty years ago wasn't really very nice in terms of aboriginal people. So you didn't want to see it. There was better not to have it than to have this kind of negativity. So I think students need to see themselves in the system, and they need to see themselves in the curriculum in a meaningful and constructive way. It doesn't mean everything's positive because there's really hard things to learn like residential schools or the Indian [inaudible] system or students are going to see on the front page of the news usually protest. So they need, there needs to be a context for kind of deconstructing that or kind of understanding that. So I think that's a big part of really being able to deliver successful education to indigenous children. Now having said that, that's not a bad thing for anybody either. So, or I teach, almost everybody I teach is non-indigenous, and they get an indigenous teacher. I never had one until I was in my Ph.D. in my last year, like, at [inaudible]. There was Laura Fitzner was here, and she was, like, the first indigenous teacher I ever had, and I went to schools on reserve. So finally you see someone who kind of gets it, right, and most of the time you're kind to, you're always trying to negotiate your identity in this situation, and, you know, as a graduate student, I kind of have the skill set to do that, but someone in Grade Two may not. So they may act out in certain ways that represents, you know, a family situation that they have, but then it becomes your problem as an individual as opposed to maybe there's a problem with the system, and maybe we need to respond in a different way to this child who has this experience, this family and community experience that it's a good fit with a system that very much supports certain kinds of values and behaviour. Yeah, like, even when I just think about my, with my children's education. So when they do the, in Grade Ten, they do the careers and then they do how to be a good citizen in Canada. So in Grade Ten, currently right now in the Ontario curriculum in the civics and careers course, I think that would be a real opp. So to me, there's an opportunity to really teach students who are learning how to be good Canadians. So they're learning about the governance system in Canada. So they don't learn about First Nation governance. So they don't learn that there's this whole what I call the matrix, this whole alternative reality of the assembly of First Nations and First

Nation governments and, you know, [inaudible], you know, governance. They don't learn anything about that, and here's an opportunity for them to learn about it. They don't learn about treaties. One of the things that I say about treaties that I think most Canadians don't understand is, certainly, they're not being educated in this way is that indigenous nations didn't just make treaties with themselves. They made them with Canada. I'm a treaty person. So I have treaty responsibilities, and I have treaty rights. So the Robinson [inaudible] treaty, my ancestor signed it. I have a treaty, but so does Canada. They have that treaty with me. So do Canadians. So they don't recognize that they're actually treaty partners, and they have responsibilities, and they have to honour those responsibilities as well. So when I teach that in university, they're, students are usually stunned. They're, like, I never thought about it that way. I'm, like, yeah. You do. Like, you do have them. I don't, we don't have them by ourselves. We have them with another nation, and there's these agreements in there that one side hasn't lived up to very well. So I think those are opportunities to be able to teach students that what does it mean to be a treaty partner with aboriginal peoples. What does that mean to be a treaty, how do I live up to that responsibility? One of the exercises I give my class is I want you to go find out which treaty that you're from. So if you're anywhere in Canada, there's a treaty or there's a claim going on. So in Toronto there's particular treaties. If someone's from, you know, Eastern Ontario, they have to figure out, like, whose treaty territory are you on. Like, what is that treaty? In places where they're negotiating them, who are the people there? You're on their territory. So I think there's these real opportunities where students can learn how to be almost held accountable, at least hold the people they elect into power accountable. Like, I want someone who's actually going to honour aboriginal and treaty rights. So I think, so that's a real opportunity to learn that, but that's not the kind of, I think because I'm First Nations, indigenous person in [inaudible], and that's how I kind of raise my kids, they look at that curriculum, and they don't see anything about native people in there, and they're living in a society where they know that there's treaties. So there's an absence of that, and to me, that's an incredible opportunity to be able to teach kids who are being taught how to be good Canadians in the civics course and what does that mean about what it means to have appropriate and respectful kind of relationships with indigenous peoples in Canada. What does it mean to be a treaty partner?

Beware of Assumptions

>> I think the greatest impact that teachers can have or educators can have with elementary and secondary school students is to be open to their experience. The lived experience that they have. What that can, they can bring into the classroom, and I think also being sensitive to those kind of experiences because they can be very good or very bad. I think recognizing there's a diversity. So in an urban situation, there may be cases where teachers will not even know or have that much experience with indigenous students. So I think it's important to recognize they're not all the same. So maybe you might have one in one year, and then it might be a couple of years before you have another one, not to assume that that experience is always the same. I think also recognizing that education has a history in Canada. So although education's really valued I think probably by anybody, any newcomer or settlers that are in Canada, but for

indigenous peoples, that history's been really different. So in some of the research and work I've done at the community level, you can't always assume that students are being pushed to go to school and to achieve, but a lot of parents have had really horrible and negative experiences at school. Some teacher, or some parents really wouldn't be sending their parents to school, this is very criticized by a lot of the teachers. You know, I've done a lot of focus groups and interviews with teachers, and they say, but they don't make them go to school. I make my kids go to school, but the parents don't want to do that because they had horrible experiences at school or they went to residential school. So I think there's this history. So it's not, like, they don't want to go to school, or their parents are, or this is a very deliberate action. It's because there's a history. They don't associate school and sending their child to school as necessarily being a good or a positive kind of thing. So I think it's important to understand that history, and that there's a context for how, for the history behind a student's experience in school, and to recognize that it may not be. I mean, my kids don't necessarily have that experience because they're growing up in Toronto with, you know, parents who are both teachers. You have no choice. You're going to school. So I think, and, you know, so far, the experiences have been, let's say, what mine was like when I was growing up or the experience of my parents what there's was like when they were growing up. So I think you can't always make that assumption. So I think it's, I guess if that was one message that I would give is just don't make assumptions, and you have to be really open. That there's just going to be this diversity of experience, but at the same time, there's also this kind of common history that happened with indigenous peoples in Canada that impacts how education is experienced and perceived, and that then gets passed on.

Building Content Knowledge

>> For the teachers in training, that they, it would be ideal if they were able to get the academic education to know something about being able to teach the curriculum they're expected to be able to teach. That they're able to teach, you know, early contact. Like, that wasn't always necessarily a bad thing because if there's treaties that talk about cooperation and nation-to-nation relationships, to not start history with colonization. That there was actually a history in Canada. That there were indigenous nations across North America. They had their own systems and knowledge. They had their own governance systems. They had their own legal systems. They weren't on the, you know, shores waiting for the iron pots to arrive. They were doing stuff and functioning as nations, interacting as nations. They had diplomacy, treaties prior to contact. That there was this life in North America that was thousands and thousands of years old. Colonization and contact's more recent in the history, but, really, we have a lot of history that's way beyond that. So I think that's really important for I think educators to know and to get some of that content that can support the kind of curriculum that they're expected to deliver. I think it's really hard for them to get that. Like, right now, I don't think it's really hard in a one year, eight month [inaudible] program to get that. I think universities have to respond. Like, I think if they're able to even take a course in aboriginal studies program, even introduction to aboriginal studies I think would help with that just so you know where to start. It would be I think really helpful if they also knew where to get information because you may not have it, but [inaudible] I've had

teachers who just said, who would come because I work at aboriginal studies, and who would come in and say I've been told I'm teaching the native studies course in Grade 12. What do you have, and they have the summer to prepare for this, and they kind of have to learn this material, learn this curriculum, and they have to teach this course, and I'm, like, well, you know what, usually these students spend four years here. [Inaudible] try to learn this stuff. Trying to learn this material. So I think, so that's even before they become a teacher. When they're a teacher, and they haven't had a chance to have that kind of education or opportunities or even contact with indigenous educators or people who teach in indigenous education, it's having access to resources and resource people. So if you're required to talk about, you know, early colonists, First Nation interactions, and when my son was in Grade Three, that was making maple syrup kind of thing. That they have the material to be able to I think teach that that acknowledges indigenous peoples. A lot of history doesn't or even geography doesn't or science doesn't or any English. Like, why not use English, you know, native authors in English is recognizing that there's a history. So, for example, when my son was in Grade Three, because my family does make maple syrup. Makes [inaudible] we go into the bush and make that. So that he knows that. So when they were doing, you know, the settlers making maple syrup, and this was part of this heritage, he puts his hand up and says, "Actually, they learnt that from us. Like, that was something that we did," and the teacher just said that's nice and then continued on. Like, there was no acknowledgement that there was a history before that, and people were doing things and there were things that were knowledge and activities that were being learnt from indigenous peoples that, you know, the settlers took up. So I think, but I suspect maybe the teacher actually didn't know about it because where would you have learnt that. So I think for teachers, they would need resource people and also the resources to do it.

Family Engagement

>> So what can teachers do to engage community and parents in education? Or either native education or education about aboriginal peoples or indigenous peoples. I would say, one it's going to vary depending on where you are, so if you're in a first nation context the chances of being able to identify resource people [inaudible] costing a lot of money because there just down the road. So and so can invite their grandparent or their uncle and aunt to come into the classroom. So to me there is a lot more opportunities to do that, if that's what the school philosophy is and that's the direction, you know, the teachers are going to get support for doing that. In an urban context it's a little bit trickier, because you may have to bring in people from further away to come in to do this, it may be harder to identify. So a place like Toronto where there isn't really an identifiable geographic aboriginal community, a lot harder to do that in other cities where there's like you kind of know the neighborhood. That's indigenous, it might be a little bit easier, so I think to authentically, and so I think in some places it might be a little bit easier than others. And in my experience, because I live in an urban area, a great big urban area like Toronto, I think in a place like this your teachers would likely, or school boards or schools would likely be engaging with organizations rather than a community per say. So, Native child and family services or Ontario Federation of Indian Friendships, so they're going to be, or a native Canadian centre who does a lot of work

with schools. So, as opposed to a community you're engaging almost with organizations in a community. So in an urban context where there isn't a clearly defined community like in a first nation where there's a geographic boundary, you know where the school is, you know where the kids are, you know where they live. I think it's engaging with organizations like Native Canadians or the friendship centres in urban places, who would be able to connect the teacher to the resources. So a lot of it's about connections and networking. And then I think in situations where you don't necessarily, so this is why I think resources are so important for teachers, because they need to know, like they need to know where to find that, unless you know the name of an organization on what you're looking for. It would be really kind of hard to find that you'd have to, you'd be Googling around trying to find this. So having those kind of resources are really helpful, and knowing the right kind of organizations to get in touch with, some of them are service organizations and that's not their mandate, other ones are quite happy to do that kind of work. In my experience as a parent in a large urban area like Toronto, I mean a lot of the research in native education points to two things that lead to success for indigenous students, and that's parental and family support. And that's true of anybody, if you've got that it doesn't matter where you go you're probably going to do ok. The second, if the students don't have that then the community has to step up, so in a first nation community it's more possible for that to happen. If the family for whatever reason, intergenerational trauma, isn't able to do that the community can step in, and I've seen that where communities will do that, they'll support the child.

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Identity and Culture

>> This second factor for success is identity and culture, being able to support identity and culture. If they have that, they will do a lot better than students where that's not supported in the school system. So in Toronto, I'm not anywhere near my community. I'm kind of far away from my com, so a lot of that burden falls on the parent to be able to advocate for the child if they're having a bad experience or looking for the opportunities in the curriculum or the education system for the student to be able to express what they think is important or what's relevant to them. And one of the examples that I'll give because my kids have now pretty gone through, one of them through high school, the other one just entering into high school. How even looking at the same subject matter could be looked at so differently by different teachers, and depending on their openness and comfort level I think with certain curriculum. So my older son, when he was in Grade Seven, he had a teacher who was very open. So a lot of the teachers were getting this pressure to start delivering this kind of curriculum. She was open in terms of the students who were able to identify what their own research topics might be that they wanted to talk about. Usually they present a lot as part of the curriculum now to present all the time. When I was in school, not so much. We just wrote tests and were quiet, but, so. What he, so this was an assignment in New France, and what was the relationship with I think they were still using native peoples in the curriculum. That's not bad, but it's kind of not what people say anymore. And then he came home to ask me, and I said, well, that would be treaties. So then we talked about how treaties, what kind of treaties were in New France, what First Nations people, and actually, I mean, I teach

aboriginal studies, but it's mostly, like, I guess it's a bias towards Anglo kind of relations, and, but as the Great Peace of Montreal, which is, like, a, it's actually really a stunning treaty visually, and I think at that age, kids still like to look at things that are very visual, and it has the world in them, the client systems, and it has the writing in French. So it's actually a blending of literary traditions. So the teacher was really open to that, and he did his presentation in class. So he, so in that way, the teacher learnt what that was because she didn't know what the Great Peace of Montreal was, that treaty. Everybody in the class got to learn what it was in sort of a positive kind of climate in the classroom. My other son. So, you know, he liked that. The teacher kept it, you know. Soon as I said where's your assignment, I actually kind of liked it. You know, it's all along the boards, and he says, no, she kept it, and it's up in her classroom where everybody can see it. I suspect she uses it to continue to teach, like, when someone says is there any treaties with First Nations in New France that she kinds of knows, well, there's a treaty now. And with my younger son in Grade Seven, when they did treaties, there wasn't that kind of openness. I think one way to describe it is an openness by the teachers for the student to be able to indigenize the curriculum. So the older child was able to do that. My younger child didn't even have the opportunity to do it. They just covered treaties in Grade Seven, and he came home really angry, and he didn't say anything in class because he was really disempowered in this situation where the take home message for kids was native people sign treaties so they could get alcohol, and I'm, like, well, you know what, it's a little bit more complicated than that. But same teachers, or same school, different teachers, same curriculum, and the message was completely different. So this is a message to my child who knew differently, and the message to every other child in the class, and everyone knows he's a native child in the class. My ancestors signed treaties so they could get alcohol. So it really creates a different kind of climate than openness to learning about indigenous peoples and engaging with the parent and having a respective relationship. Like, maybe the parent actually has something to bring. Like, maybe they actually have knowledge that you don't have as a teacher, even as a school, or even as a system that would be really beneficial not only to the child that they have in the school but to every child that's in the classroom. Whatever experience I think an indigenous parent has is a valid one, whether that was good or bad about the education system because now, you know, the introduction of residential, that's not a positive educational experience. So if that experience comes from that, and it's intergenerational, that's still a valid experience to be recognized I think in the education system.