Lisa Lunney Borden- Transcripts

Aboriginal Knowledge for all Students

>> I really believe that doing similar kinds of practices in schools where maybe there are no aboriginal students can actually benefit and help to decolonize education for all kids. It's so important that non-aboriginal children see the value in indigenous culture. I want my aboriginal kids in my classroom to know that their elders were mathematicians, too. That they had thinking and reasoning and problem solving that we embedded in daily practice, that they learnt from the environment, from the land, from the context, but I also want non-aboriginal students to see that valuable knowledge. One of my favourite stories that I like to tell teachers is, you know, we often, growing up in school, I heard the story that people thought the world was flat. And, you know, then they were afraid that they would sail off the edge of the world. In the [inaudible] language, there is no world for flat. In fact, the word for world is [inaudible], which translates to sitting on the surface of the sphere. So indigenous people always knew the world was a sphere. And to me, it's important that all children learn to value indigenous knowledges. Much of the indigenous knowledges of this land were the things that allowed settlers to come and survive and thrive, and it's unfortunate that the ways of colonization have marginalized that knowledge so much and have set aside those knowledges that were so important to the survival of the people who came to this country. So to me, when we investigate things like the math of birch bark biting or paddle making or how to make a canoe or how to make a snowshoe, and know all the math and science that was there long before anyone came to this country from, any Europeans came to this country or others, it, that indigenous knowledge was there. People were figuring these things out long before anyone else came and told them. So.

Countering the Myths

>> I think it's just really important to believe in kids, and I think it's really important to be open minded. I think it's important for educators to begin to question their own places of power and privilege in the world and understand how some of us have benefited from colonization while others have been marginalized, and until we understand that, until we can learn about the history of treaties, and, you know, treaties are not 500 years old. They're modern-day treaties that are inscribed in the Constitution, and we still have an obligation to fulfil those treaties. They go both ways. A treaty has never been just to keep one people peaceful while another gets to take everything, and, unfortunately, that's the way it's been taken up in society a lot. And so for me, I think we need to educate ourselves about what treaties really are. We need to educate ourselves about indigenous policies and governance and rules, and too many myths exist out there, and I don't think teachers know how to counter them when they come up in their classrooms, and I think that's important. I think people need to learn about aboriginal history in this country and the effects of colonization and the residential schools and things that have continuously put people aside, set people aside, marginalized the population. I think that until we, the settler population, begin to understand our role in that, we can't begin

to decolonize our schools. So if we're going to decolonize our schools, we need to decolonize ourselves, and that, I think, is one of the most important pieces, and believe in kids.

Understanding Language

>> Know your kids. Know their community and believe they can learn. And I think that's the fundamental place where we need to start. I like to think that all kids are brilliant, and that we need to find the ways that will work for them. And so really believing in kids is a good place to start. For me, I always thought that I needed to bring in more culture into mathematics, and what I've realized over the years is that sometimes that's the wrong approach. I think it's important to learn from a cultural base, but if you're just counting teepees instead of counting decks, that's not culturally based mathematics. And really, for me, it's about understanding ways of knowing, understanding language, and how it's structured. A big piece for me has been understanding that many indigenous languages, all Canadian indigenous languages are verb based. And so children are thinking in verbs. Whether they come to school speaking English or their indigenous language, often they still have the grammar structures and the thinking, ways of thinking that are embedded in their indigenous language. And so in my own experience, I would hear my kids, even though they're speaking English, turning nouns into verbs. Camera may miss. Who am I presenting for Christmas? And that awareness that kids were thinking in verbs was a really important component of understanding how to better teach math education. When you take processes and turn them into nouns like we do so often in mathematics, it denies the process to the kids, and it makes it static and fixed and frozen, and we present too much of mathematics as fixed and frozen, and I think we really need to expose the process, and using more verbs and more action and more activity makes that come alive for kids. And so that's one of the, I probably the most important thing I've learnt in my career in working in aboriginal education is just to really listen. Listen to how your kids are communicating about the mathematics that they're doing, that they're thinking about, and use those grammar structures as ways of thinking and to help them connect to the mathematics.