

Wab Kinew- Transcripts

Champions of Aboriginal Education

>> I think essential learning starts with the culture because when you start with indigenous culture, you're starting from the place of positivity and strength. You're starting with a real strength rather than a deficit. And I think it's key also to learn about the diversity of indigenous cultures, too. That Anishinaabe, Oji-Cree, Haudenosaunee, Delaware people, Metis, Inuit are all different peoples with their own cultures and own histories. And that's really key. I also think a lot of our history is important, especially around the treaties and around the residential school experience. I view those as key learnings as well. But the reason I start with the culture is because if you start from a place of strength, then it makes it easier to go onto those more challenging areas of education. And it also helps you to gain a better appreciation for what might have been lost in some of the places. Starting with something strong and something positive first, I think, makes the whole rest of that journey easier and more rewarding. Well, I think the Ontario Teachers Public School Union did a great job with developing their curriculum or their lesson plans. I think that that's really good. And, I think there's a lot of pockets of individual's success like Walpole Island. Walpole Island, for instance, has a really great language immersion program. As do some of the Mohawk communities in Ontario. So, I think there's a lot--pretty much in every region, there are certain champions I think we can find who are really, really leading the way. But for me, personally, I really--I'm proud of the work that we've done at the University of Winnipeg, teaching language and culture to kids after school, and also teaching entrepreneurship. And to me, it's really important because we found ways to do things which are important for our modern economy like business or science, or math. But to teach it in a way that's also inclusive of indigenous culture. And then, celebrates both culture, but also success in competing in the mainstream.

Diverse Ways of Knowing

>> One of the key insights that indigenous cultures can offer is that they often view things more in terms of process and motion and things being in a state of flux rather than things being fixed down and being solid. So, for instance, like in our day-to-day conversations, we often talk about like nouns, like I have this, you know, car, I have this, you know, outfit, this watch, these things like that. But the indigenous world views things much more in terms of them being alive. So, rather than having something you would talk about being something, you know? And so making that leap, I think is really crucial and can invite you to think about your surroundings in a different way. So, if you view--If you talk about a rock in English, you're thinking of it as being something static and something fixed and something probably not very exciting. But in Ojibwe, if you're talking about esan [phonetic] or esanic [phonetic], you're talking about something that's alive, something that has a spirit, something that's in motion right now. And if you can start to conceive of things around you in a different way, I think it's just going to open up your world view, open up your doors of perception so to speak such that you're going to

be able to think about things in many different ways in a plurality of fashions. And I think that that benefits you because it helps you think laterally on occasion. Well, also being able to think linearly. And if you can call both of those, both of those rather, you can drive innovation. You can think of different ways to solve the problem. You can think of ways to think outside the box. So, indigenous cultures are rich with examples of how to think differently and I think that the real way to gain an appreciation for them is to engage with cultural practitioners directly, so to go out into the community or to invite people into your school and to have a conversation with them and listen to what they have to say and you can really learn a lot from that. And then, there are also of course like tons of great books out there. They can offer you a little bit of insight as well like the "The Mishomis Book" by Eddie Benton-Banai or academic text like "Dancing on Our Turtle's Back" by Leanne Simpson, things like that. But the best way is always to start with the real people and to learn from them directly. I would actually say that social media, the impact that it's had is that it should make you a lot more free to talk about things with young people because I know we often like censored books or we say, "Oh, we can't teach this book because it's so violent." Well, guess what, young people have already seen everything imaginable in the world through YouTube and though shares on Facebook and on Twitter so they likely have a much higher capacity to assimilate new information or to be able to understand things that may be challenging to polite conversation. Obviously, the challenges as an educator to try and cultivate morals, ethics, a sense of what is appropriate in the public sphere. But I think about, you know, for instance, like a book like "Three Day Road" by Joseph Boyden which is like a master work of fiction but sometimes, people are scared to teach it because there's violence in it, right? But guess what? Through video games and YouTube and social media, I'm sure that almost all of your students have seen much, much worse, right? So, to me, social media opens up a lot of different things, it's a Pandora's Box in some ways. It can open up the door to bullying or to, you know, dysfunctional behaviour or self-defeating attitudes. But it's also something that's making the world much more open and transparent and is forcing people to mature at a younger age and I think that the sooner we confront that reality, the better off we'll be.

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[Foreign Language]

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Let's work hard and live in a good way together.

Indigenous Cultures

>> One program that we've had success with is our young entrepreneurs program. And basically we introduce our participants to the idea of developing a business plan and pitching it to investors. But along the way, we also introduce them to indigenous culture. And that's important because in many indigenous cultures there are other ways of looking at the world. So for instance, there's a different way of looking at wealth, rather than judging wealth by how much you accumulate, wealth is judged by how much you can give away. And again, when you're looking at the natural environment, it's not viewed as something inert or something that's just there for your convenience to extract

wealth from, rather the environment is something that you're a part of and it's something that is a part of you as well. So if you are going to have an activity that has an impact on the world around you then you have to figure out a way to offset it and a way to sort of make it right once again. And these are, I think, great cultural concepts to learn about because, you know, they can provide identity and self-worth to young people. But I think they also are going to help us in the long term if we can start and, you know, shift our thinking more in that direction. Because if we start thinking about wealth more in terms of what you give back then I think we'll see a lot more people being great humanitarians. If we start thinking about our environment as something that we are engaged in then we're probably going to cultivate a more sustainable lifestyle. And so, I think that, you know, in indigenous culture--it's valuable for First Nation's Metis and Inuit students because, you know, it can provide them with a sense of identity. But I think it's also valuable for all students and it's valuable for all people because it might show us some other ways of thinking what can help us meet some of the challenges we face in the modern world.

Listen First

>> My advice especially for people coming outside of--coming from outside of the community, I think that the best way to always begin is to listen before you talk, right? So, maybe the way to do that is to ask a question first, you know, and just see where people are at and listen to what they say and then you can bridge to what you're about to teach. I think if you're going to teach culture, it's really important to reach out to the community first and to see where they're at because it's inappropriate to teach Ojibwe culture in a Mohawk community for instance, right, or to teach, you know, Oji-Cree in a Metis community, right? So you should really reach out to the local people and see where they're at and see how they want to participate. And, yeah, I think the guiding principle is always just listen before you talk. I think that a lot of it is based on the media. I think that, you know, studies have shown that the majority of non-native people get their information about the indigenous community from the media and so that's been usually important. And what you've seen over the past decade roughly has been like a slow march into the collective consciousness of First Nations' Metis and Inuit issues. And I think it really started with the residential school era being brought into the public sphere and it's continued through things like the Attawapiskat housing crisis and Idle No More and now all the attention on the assembly of First Nations such that, you know, what were once viewed as issues within the community are now discussed by the country at-large. So the way that that impacts learning in particular as I've seen is that you're starting to see residential schools being taught almost everywhere in the country at the secondary school level and it's also being worked into earlier years in certain other places. I was at an event about a month ago and during the day, I did a presentation to the high school students and I asked who among them had learnt about residential schools and their classes and every single hand went up. I asked the same question to an audience that was mostly their parents and grandparents that night and not a single hand went up. So it shows you that there is a bit of a generational change happening and that the educational system is transforming and that's important. But where I see it going next is really to include the culture more which is happening in

some places and there are certain champions who are leading that. But I think that if we really advocate and we push that forward, we're going to see a lot more innovation come into the classroom and a lot more exciting approaches to education.

Valuable and Long-lasting Teaching

>> I believe it's called the Project of the Heart, is really successful one that we've profiled on TV in the past. And it was sort of an experiential learning approach to teaching about residential schools where the students each painted a tile based on their reflection of what the residential school era meant to them or the lasting impact that they were left with after learning about it. And to me, that was important because it took something which could have just been like a very dry history lesson and, you know, brought like a very kind of contemporary experiential approach to it. So I think that that's important. But also, when we examine why it's successful and we look at, you know, the other ways of teaching First Nations' Metis and Inuit issues or culture, why they can be successful. I think they're most successful when they are able to foster a sense of empathy or a sense of compassion or a sense of shared obligation to one another that were, in fact, perhaps coming from different cultural backgrounds but were all very much the same at the end of the day. We want the same things in life. So I think that anything that teachers can do to make people identify with one another, to empathize with one another, I think is key and it's crucial to making those teachings valuable and long lasting. And then there's always just making things fun and awesome and that helps a lot too. So, I know that if we talk about exciting battles in history, often, you know, whether that's between, you know, different nations or, you know, maybe the war of 1812, a lot of young people get excited hearing those kinds of stories or if you can do activities outside, if you can do cultural learning, hoop dance, pow wow, stuff like that, you know. And as much as you can make learning fun, I think that that's a real, real way to ensure success as well.