

Module 1 Video Transcript

Welcome

Kaleb Child

Friends and relatives, my name is Kaleb Child, and I'm from the Kwakiutl First Nation located on the north end of Vancouver Island. I'm also the Director of Indigenous Education at the Ministry of Education here in Victoria, British Columbia.

It is customary and protocol in these lands to recognize that I too am a guest in the territory of the Lekwungen-speaking peoples and the Songhees and the Esquimalt nations. It is with gratitude, love, and respect that I acknowledge the First Peoples of this territory for allowing us to live and to work and to raise our beautiful family here.

I begin as well with an expression of gratitude and recognizing the cultural metaphor of a braided rope. In British Columbia, some of the greatest strengths in the history that we celebrate and recognize as we move forward as a collective system is recognizing the integral relationships, leadership, and the support of our First Nations communities, Métis, Inuit voices that continue to hold us up as we move this work forward, the First Nations Education Steering Committee, our colleagues at the Métis Nation BC, as well as so many other advocates and voices that continue to anchor this work and the right things, the values, the cultures, the languages, the traditions of the great diversity of this territory now referred to as British Columbia.

It is with great gratitude, love, and respect that I also recognize Jo Chrona for her ongoing leadership and tireless energy in holding all of us up and supporting us as we engage in this journey together. Colleagues such as Denise Augustine, director from Cowichan Valley, currently is an educational lead here at the Ministry of Education. The networks that are in place and that have been foundational in supporting all of us in this work, as well as those networks that are just being sparked at this time. It's truly our connections, the relationships from the educator to educator, from within our school families to our school districts and across our communities that will really help to take this work forward.

I'd like to remind us, and I think of some of the teachings and the stories from my family, that our teachers, the knowledge keepers, the wisdom is all around us. We just have to, as per today's invitation, be willing to listen with our ears, our eyes, and our hearts as we come in to this work. I'm also reminded that in my home territory, our communities invite us, challenge us that we've never been as prepared as we are now to engage in this work. I think we should be far more fearful in not taking any steps on this journey than being willing to grapple and to reflect deeply on our own personal and professional journey and how we've come to be is part of this story.

We have the foundations in this country and in this province, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Article 14 one, two, and three, 15 one, and 21 one, that inspire us and that call us to action as do the 94 Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The profound work of so many voices from across our communities and the educational system that are grounded in the First Peoples Principles of Learning that you're going to hear about throughout the remainder of your work today all inspire us to think and to consider and to dream the art of possible around the revised curriculum that sets the pathway not only today, but to the future of our collective societies here in British Columbia.

I invite you to engage in this conversation courageously. This work is about truth and the duty to truth for Indigenous peoples. It is also about the duty to reconciliation. And whether you identify as an Indigenous person, First Nations, Métis, Inuit, or Indigenous from another part of this great territory, or as a non-Indigenous person, we all come to this work with great responsibility. And really it is part of our own reflective practice to look at ourselves in the mirror as we consider the impacts that we have on a daily basis to our learners, to their families, and to their communities.

I'm reminded also of the words of my beautiful mother-in-law, my great-aunts, my grandmother, my great-grandmother, the collective wisdom of our Kwakiutl-speaking peoples, who remind us that our work on a day-to-day basis as parents, as educators, as community our responsibility is to make things right. And from the spirit of reconciliation and the work that we do with our hands and our hearts is really to engage in making the world right again. As we look back and reflect on our collective history in this country, in this province, in the education system, there are those dark corners, and it is important that we recognize the truth of those stories, the truths of our communities in order to wrap around this collective journey going forward.

So I invite us to think about how we play a part, how we lead from where we stand as part of that braided rope of the collective responsibility that you're going to hear about from colleague Jo Chrona and so many other voices that have come and that have invited us to this conversation.

In closing, I'd like to just acknowledge each of you out there as educators across the system. I'd like to thank you on behalf of all of the networks and all of the people that hold us up and that entrust us each and every day with their most sacred gifts, our children.

Introduction

Jo Chrona

My name is Jo Chrona. I am Ts'msyen, from the Kitsumkalum First Nation, and I am Ganhada, which is Raven, and belong to the House of K'oom.

Today you're going to go through a process that will be a combination of presentation, a small group talk or a partner chat, and some group activities. You may be experiencing this workshop as one full-day session or chunked into smaller pieces.

One of the things that you'll be asked to think about is to be in a place that we ask learners to be in our schools and classrooms. We ask them to be open to learning something new, to perhaps think about things in different ways, to share ideas, to reflect, and sometimes to challenge ideas that might be barriers to further learning.

We'd like to provide you with the opportunity right now to introduce yourselves and to share any burning questions you may have come in here with. So, either with the small group at your table or with a partner or neighbor, introduce yourself, so your name, your role in education, where you're from, and share any questions that you might've come in that you're hoping are answered today, or perhaps any wonderings that you're thinking about.

Educators' Thoughts

Denise Augustine

I think we need to continue to challenge our assumptions, so really ... We're teaching our kids to be critical thinkers. We need to do that for ourselves as well.

Lynne Tomlinson

The difference in this work is that you have to move out of your district, into the community, get to know the people who want to work with you, and then spend a lot of time listening.

Heidi Wood

Change doesn't happen when we're only working with one student or one group of learners. And I think that when we've included all learners and we've embedded this within all of our curriculum, we see change happening for everybody and not just for some.

Brooke Moore

If I'm in the position of a learner, I get to ask questions, and I get to make mistakes, and I get to look over my friend's shoulder and ask them to help me out, and be in a community of people that are willing to help me move along as a learner.

Judy Halbert

We can get more comfortable with uncertainty when we're working as a team, a team within our school and a team across schools. And we say that the work of improving outcomes for kids, all kids, is it's just too hard for any one teacher to do alone.

Intentions

Jo Chrona

Throughout the day, you'll be doing a combination of listening, thinking, talking, questioning, and processing. Some of the questions that you may be asked to think about include, how can Indigenous knowledge and perspectives enhance learning for all students? How can we look at the First Peoples Principles of Learning as a framework for our practice to create an equitable education system, ensuring that the system is responsive to Indigenous learners? What can our classrooms, schools, and districts look like and sound like when they're grounded in the First Peoples Principles of Learning? What about resources to help respectfully integrate Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into our classrooms? And importantly, what continued learning do we each need to engage in?

As we move forward today in our learning about Indigenous education and the multi-facets of that, we need to be thoughtful about a few things. We're all at different places in our learning journeys. There are people you are learning with who have been doing this work for a long time. There are people who are you are learning with who maybe this is their first time talking about Indigenous education. Because we're at different places, we want to be respectful of each other. We want to be thoughtful about how we interact with each other. We want to be patient, and we want to ask some tough questions, but do so in thoughtful ways. We want to do our own learning and, ideally, hopefully, support the learning of our colleagues.

How do we come to know what we don't know? In order to develop the knowledge and understandings we need to create an equitable and responsive education system; we often need to critically examine our own biases. We all have biases. They're based in our interpretation of our life experiences. We cannot be without them. The best we can do is become fully aware of them and understand how they affect what we value and what we don't value.

The quote that you see now is taken from a blog site of an educator in the United States. Her goal was to try and help her students understand that they have biases based on their experiences in life, and she wanted them to understand that different people with different experiences can understand the world in different ways. "I believe that when we are unaware of how our own biases limit our understanding, then we are powerless to do anything to change that. However, when we're able to see beyond the limits of our own lenses, then we are able to actively work to push beyond them."

Before we continue with today's learning, we would like to provide you with some time to think about two crucial questions. Why focus on Indigenous education in BC? Why mandate the integration of Indigenous content perspectives from K to 12? At this point, we'd like you to take the opportunity to have that conversation with your fellow learners.

Why Indigenous Education in BC?

Jo Chrona

When we think about Indigenous education in BC, we are talking about two things. One is an education system that supports the needs and achievement of Indigenous learners. This includes focusing on individual learner success and systemic barriers to equity. But it also includes a discussion about what are the education needs for all learners about the cultures, histories, and Indigenous peoples of BC and Canada. And this includes learning about and from. When we were having this conversation five or 10 years ago, we were often just talking about the needs of Indigenous learners. We weren't talking about systemic changes. We weren't talking about the education that all learners have to engage in in order to come to a better understanding of Indigenous cultures and people.

When we think about Indigenous education in BC, we have to understand that learners need to see who they are reflected in the education system. And in BC, almost 12% of learners in the public system are self-identified Indigenous students. Of that amount, we have almost 8,000 who are students who live on reserve and attend the public system. And we have an additional 46 or 4,700 students who attend First Nation schools. If we want our education system to respond to their needs, then we need to ensure that Indigenous content and perspectives are embedded throughout. Not only what students are learning, but how we approach education.

A number of years ago, the Ministry of Education released documents talking about the transformation in BC. One of the documents contained this quote. "The inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives and knowledge is based on the understanding that these perspectives and knowledge are part of the historical and contemporary foundations of BC and Canada. With more in-depth knowledge of Aboriginal peoples and their histories, all students in BC will have a foundation for developing mutual understanding and respect."

And in more recent years, there are additional external motivating factors driving the work that we do. Most Canadians are now aware of the Truth And Reconciliation Commission Of Canada and the 94 Calls to Action. More are aware of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, known as UNDRIP, and more recently the Draft Principles that Guide the Province of BC's Relationship with Indigenous Peoples. This requires that as a society we do not just continue with business as usual. All sectors of society, including education, need to think about what this means in terms of recognizing what we might need to change.

And for those who need to connect with this work in a different way, there is the moral imperative. We live in a country that is slowly coming to terms with an ugly history of cultural genocide. Some argue that it was genocide, period. A country that had policies that made it okay to destroy families and communities, languages and cultures. To let children, die in unmarked graves, the locations not even known or communicated to parents. That made it okay to disconnect people from the land that they lived on for centuries and made it okay to devalue the knowledge and the very lives of Indigenous peoples. We have a collective responsibility to move forward in a different way. To loosely paraphrase Justice Murray Sinclair, it was an education system, the residential school system, that led us to the damaged relationship Indigenous peoples in Canada have today. It would be our education systems now that can lead us to a better society.

So, where do we begin? Or what do we do next? The work doesn't begin with classroom resources. Resources are important, but something else needs to happen first, which will then guide our decisions with respect to the resources that we choose to use. Our BC curriculum mandates the inclusion of teaching about Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in a variety of subject and grade levels. The inclusion of First Peoples content and perspective still needs work. There are pockets of the curriculum where First Peoples content and perspectives are still absent or only included in a tokenistic manner.

This work will continue in the next few years as we all continue to grow an understanding of how to effectively and respectfully integrate First Peoples content in every grade and subject area. But as that happens, we need to be thinking about and examining our own knowledges, our values, and perspectives. This includes engaging in critical thinking about what we value in our education system and why. This work will help inform what we choose in terms of classroom resources and teacher resources. It will inform our choices as we move forward.

Looking at Assumptions

Jo Chrona

One of the first steps in this work is looking at the assumptions that some of us hold in our system, these assumptions that hold us back from moving forward in Indigenous education. In the next few minutes, I'm going to share a few of those assumptions and challenge us to think about where we see and hear them alive in our schools and classrooms, because they are there. This may require some vulnerability. It may require some risk-taking when we're asked to think about which of these assumptions we still personally hold.

Two of the assumptions that are still commonly reflected in our education system are that if we just focus on a multicultural approach in education, we can do the work of Indigenous education.

And another assumption still alive and well is that we already teach in a culturally neutral system, so we ask why are we talking about embedding Indigenous content and perspectives?

To help understand why the multicultural approach will not help us grow in the area of Indigenous education, I want to share a little story. So, a number of years ago, I was working with a few educators in the area of English language arts. We were talking about what we might want to see in the transformation of the ELA curriculum K to 12. At the time, the representative from the Ministry of Education shared a couple of non-negotiables as we moved forward. One of them was that we had to be integrating Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in the curriculum.

And there was a teacher at the table who asked a question. I'm glad he asked the question, because I don't think it was an easy question for him to ask, but he asked it respectfully not to advance an agenda, but because he really wanted to know. He said, "I understand cultural relevancy. I understand that if I have Indigenous students in my classroom, that I want that reflected in the material that I use." He said, "I don't have any, however. There might be a couple of Indigenous students in my entire school. The students in my classroom, their families come from different places in the world." And he said, "Why are we mandating the inclusion of Indigenous content and perspectives in the basic curriculum but not the perspectives and knowledge of all the other cultural heritages represented by my students?"

I thought about it for a few minutes, and I asked him to think about the places in the world where his families came from, whether they arrived in Canada last week or whether they've been in Canada for the last 150 years. I said, "Think about those countries. Are the languages of those places still being spoken there? Is the knowledge of those places still being taught and learned in the schools there? Is the literature, whether it's oral, written, or visual literature, still growing and thriving in those places?"

And his response to those questions was, "Yes." So, I said, "This is the only place on earth where these languages have grown from, where this knowledge is connected to, where these literatures grow from. If we don't teach about Indigenous knowledge and perspectives here that reflect the Indigenous peoples here, it does not get learned anywhere else on the planet." He thought about that for a few minutes, and it was like a light bulb going off for him.

Indigenous Learners

Jo Chrona

Another set of assumptions that we need to challenge are the assumptions that we often hold sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously about Indigenous learners. Assumptions such as First Nations learners cannot achieve success in every facet of education, or that if the system is not working for learners, that the learners need to change to fit within the existing education system. I would challenge us to think about where these assumptions come from. Why do we think First Nation students cannot achieve success in every facet of education including academic success? Why do we think that learners need to change to meet the needs of the system?

If we look at the data, for example, including BC's six-year graduation rate in the public system, we will see that overall the graduation rate or the six-year completion rate for non-Indigenous

students has remained relatively steady. And that even though we've made significant growth in the last 10 years with respect to the achievement of Indigenous learners, we still have a ways to go to achieve parity.

When we look at the data of the achievement rate for First Nation students living on reserve, attending the public system, we can drill down and see that there's even more disparity. We have a lot of work to do if we want a system that's serving the needs of all its learners.

Now, some folks are concerned when we use the six-year graduation rate as one of the markers of achievement. People will talk about, well, we're working on feelings of safety and belonging in our school, shouldn't that be enough? Yes, that's important. Yes, that's vital. But it is not the only marker, and it cannot be the only marker of success for Indigenous learners in our education system. We have to remind ourselves what the end goal of our education system is. It is that students graduate, and they graduate with the knowledge base and skill sets they need to move on.

People who might be familiar with the Network of Inquiry and Innovation or Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network, now called the Network of Inquiry and Indigenous Education, will be familiar with the phrase that all students in BC need to graduate with dignity, purpose, and options. Dignity means that students leave our system without having to have sacrificed who they are. That doesn't mean that students will achieve their grade 12 at the expense of their cultural heritage and pride in who they are, no matter what context they are in and how they define themselves. Graduating with purpose means that they have come to understand that they have passions and that they can work towards fulfilling those passions in their lives. Graduating with options means that they have the option to go on to post-secondary after grade 12 or go into the workforce.

If we lower the limitations or have low expectations of Indigenous learners, they will not be graduating with dignity, purpose, and options. So yes, feelings of safety are important, feelings of belonging are important, but those are tools to also help them move towards achieving in our system.

One might even ask, why are we comfortable with using the six-year graduation rate? Why not the five-year graduation rate? Some people are expressing concern that we're saying it's okay for Indigenous learners to graduate in six years, but we expect non-Indigenous learners to graduate in five years. These are assumptions that we need to continue to challenge if we want to ensure an equitable education system.

So, when we think about success for Indigenous learners in our system, we want to ensure that they are graduating with a BC Dogwood. We want to ensure that we're using data in a way that helps inform questions that we need to ask that help get to the roots of systemic barriers. We also have to believe that Indigenous learners are capable. Like all learners, some may need more support in certain areas than others, but it's our responsibility of an education system to figure out what supports are needed so that they can continue to learn and achieve.

I would hope that in a number of years, we stop hearing questions such as how are the learners ready for school when they come into our education system and more questions concerning how are schools ready to receive the learners who come into it. This means understanding that our system needs to provide according to student needs. That's not always easy. It's a challenge when we live in such a diverse society, but that diversity is also our strength. This

means responding to the diversity. It means respecting Indigenous learners. I also understand that there's as much diversity between Indigenous learners as there is between any other group of learners in our education system.

Who's Responsible

Jo Chrona

One of the other common assumptions that we see alive and well in BC is the idea that Indigenous education is only the responsibility of a school district's Aboriginal Education Department. We're never going to get to a place of transformation toward an equitable system if we think that this work only relies on the efforts of a few people within each district. It is the responsibility of every adult in the system to be taking on this work. Yes, Aboriginal Education Departments are important in school districts, but the people that work within them are there to guide and support the work. They cannot shoulder this work all on their own. When we think about the responsibility that each of us has, it means thinking about our spheres of influence no matter what our role is in education, whether we are supporting students in the classroom, whether we're a teacher, whether we're a school administrator or one of the other myriad roles that makes our system work.

When every single one of us commits to doing our own learning, to challenging our preconceptions, to working with each other to support Indigenous learners and the learning of non-Indigenous peoples, then we're going to see the transformation that we're asking to happen.

Indigenous Knowledge

Jo Chrona

One of the other assumptions that we need to challenge is that Indigenous education is just an initiative, it's an extra, it's an add-on, or that Indigenous approaches to education or Indigenous knowledge are watered down education. We need to ask where these assumptions come from. And sadly, the answer will often be found in the devaluing of Indigenous peoples and cultures in Canada. We're still living with a legacy of intentional systemic attempts to destroy Indigenous cultures to assimilate people because only certain ways of understanding and being in the world were valued. We still see that legacy alive and well in our schools.

We ask people to critically examine why that is. Why is it that Indigenous content and perspective based courses are often an elective? We need to critically examine whose knowledge is valued, whose knowledge has been valued. Why is only some knowledge valued and the knowledge of others not valued? When we think about the power of Indigenous knowledge not only to be present in our schools for the benefit of Indigenous learners, we often forget to talk about how powerful this knowledge is for non-Indigenous learners as well.

Valuing First Peoples' Knowledge and Perspectives

Jo Chrona

So we understand in a culturally relevant education system we want to ensure that Indigenous knowledge and perspectives is present throughout the curriculum and in pedagogical approaches for Indigenous learners. But as indicated earlier, some of the discussion that we're now having is about the power of Indigenous knowledge and education approaches for non-Indigenous learners, and sometimes we can hear that best reflected in the voices of students themselves. So, in a few moments, you're going to be asked to watch a video that was created by students in an English First Peoples 12 class in the Langley School of Fine Arts. This video is their creation.