

Frequently Asked Questions

This is a text document including all of the frequently asked questions on the indigenous allies in Education website which can be found

at: <https://sites.google.com/view/kootenay-indigenous-allies/learning-journey>

What if I know nothing about Indigenous People?

"As educators, we know that not knowing something is not a problem; it is not wanting to learn that is a barrier.

(Chrona, 2022, p13)

As Chrona explains in Wayi Wah! Indigenous Pedagogies (2022), it is important to know that we are all learners. Due to the forces of colonization, which have repressed Indigenous stories and history, most of us have a lot to learn about Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous people themselves, are sometimes just beginning to learn about their own history, languages and cultures because assimilationist school systems taught nothing about it, and often families were scared to share their language and culture with their children due to abuse faced at Residential schools.

Watch this Vimeo Video by Lenape and Potawatami educational scholar, Dr. Susan D. Dion, about "The Perfect Stranger" which is the idea that many of us think we have no connection to Indigenous People, when actually all Canadians have some kind of connection to Indigenous People, whether they realize it or not. It's important to open our minds to the possibility that we are already connected. If we have questions, it's important to know that we can reach out, ask questions and begin to build relationships.

Dion also recommends listening to Thomas King's, 2003 Massey Lecture Series entitled "The Truth About Stories" or "You're not the Indian I had in mind"

Activity:

One activity Dion recommends is to look at a series of photos of Indigenous people and write/reflect/discuss about how you connect to these images. On this page I have selected a series of images of local people of Indigenous ancestry.

Reflect/Journal/Discuss: How do you connect to these images? What surprises you?

Reflection Questions For Educators (Suggested by

Higginbottom (2023) p. 122)

- What does this remind me of?
- What do I understand about this image?
- What is my connection to Indigenous Peoples?
- What do I know?
- What do I not know?
- What informs this knowing?

What if I make a mistake?

Fear holds us back, courage and humility allow us to learn from mistakes.

Truth & Reconciliation is going to be a difficult journey. Have no doubt, this will be hard work involving a lot of personal reflection and moving out of our comfort zones. It is perfectly understandable that you might feel nervous and unsure of where and how to begin. There are and will be tremendous obstacles. But just because it is hard, it

doesn't mean that it is impossible. When our students make mistakes, we know that this is a learning experience, that it will help them grow and become stronger. I often tell my students there is "no learning without mistakes". Learning and growing as good human beings is hard work; it involves making mistakes and picking ourselves up and persevering. We know in our hearts that change needs to happen. It is in reconnecting with our hearts that we will begin to find the way towards Truth & Reconciliation.

Reflection Question on making mistakes:

- "What fears might you have about doing this work? How can you respond to those fears in ways that do not shut down your learning?" **(Chrona, 2022, p17)**
- Think of a time when you were willing to make mistakes to learn and grow? What about this past experience can inform you on your journey towards Truth & Reconciliation?
- What would you tell one of your own students who was struggling with these same fears?
- What has helped you find courage in the past? What are some things you can do to cultivate courage in your life?
- How has humility helped you accept things as they are in your life?
- How easy is it for you to forgive your own mistakes? What are some ways you can offer yourself forgiveness for past mistakes?
- When you have made mistakes in the past, how have you repaired the harm?

Am I responsible for mistakes of the past?

We didn't make this system, but we are the ones who can change it.

I have listened to many different Indigenous speakers through the years at professional days and other events. Without exception, every one has clearly stated that "no one alive today created residential schools", no one here is responsible for creating racist systems which are causing Indigenous youth to commit suicide at very high rates, or to have much lower rates of graduation. As Higginbottom(2023) re-iterates "I do not blame current teachers, leaders, or districts for our current inequities. We all inherited this system. (p.86-87)

However, the reality is, that we are the current teachers/leaders/adults who have inherited this system, and therefore we have a responsibility to do what we can to repair the harms and to try to make things right. If we don't, we simply pass this work on to our children and grandchildren. The longer we wait, the more harm accumulates and the more difficult it gets to repair the damage. Like with a leak in a pipe, if we don't pay attention and do what we can to fix it, we might end up flooding our whole house and having to rebuild the whole thing.

Ultimately, we need to do the hard work of decolonization of our education systems because it will benefit all of us. As Chrona points out, anti-Indigenous racism is not "all in the past" (2022, p.33) We do this work for our descendants, because we know in our hearts that there is a better way. Indigenous peoples are simply asking for fair treatment, for equitable access to resources, for self determination, the ability to pass on their language and culture, and for access to and compensation for land that was stolen under Canadian law.

This website of Indigenous Corporate Training Inc. created by Bob Joseph, author of "[21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act.](#)" (2018), offers many great resources on Truth & Reconciliation, such as this in depth article "Four Common barriers to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples."

Is it ok to learn an Indigenous Language?

Yes! Please learn a local Indigenous language.

Not only is it a sign of respect to learn and use local Indigenous languages, these languages are endangered, and without efforts of all of us to learn the languages they are at risk of being lost, along with the unique world-views and ways of knowing that they contain. UNESCO has declared 2022-2032 the Decade of Indigenous Languages, in an attempt to revitalize them.

One caveat to this, is that you must learn Indigenous languages from and under the **guidance of Indigenous Language Teachers** (*or someone who is working with a language teacher and has permission to share the language*). It is important to honour the language teacher's time and realize this is a significant gift they are sharing with us. Of course, Indigenous Peoples need to be prioritized for language learning opportunities, and there are few teachers, so their time is scarce and precious. Always, offer appropriate gifts and ask about protocol if you aren't sure about what this is.

- This is a blog post about the start of my K'tunaxa Language learning:
- This is a blog post about the inspiring example of K'tunaxa Language Apprentice Aiyanna Twigg.

Language Learning Resources:

- Columbia Basin Environmental Educators Network (CBEEN) is offering numerous zoom language sessions for teachers.
- First Peoples Cultural Council: First Voices First Nations languages from what is now known as BC are developing language resources for many of the diverse languages in this area.

- Inchelium Language House: The Sinixt Language, ńsyilxčń, is part of the Salish language family.
- Selkirk College: Beginners ńsyilxčń 1 is instructed by students of the Salish School of Spokane and Inchelium Language House.
- Salish School of Spokane
- T'kikstn Language Revitalization Project (Autonomous Sinixt) An Interior Salish Dialect, Snslxcin, is a regional dialect this group is trying to revitalize. see the website and book: Not Extinct: Keeping the Sinixt Way

What About Cultural Appropriation?

As Deerchild explains, the key difference between cultural appreciation and appropriation, is that appreciation involves "mutual respect, consent and participation. If it is about us, it includes us." (CBC, 2016) For non-indigenous educators sometimes Discerning between cultural appropriation and appreciation can be challenging and nuanced. We are asked to indigenize our curriculum, while at the same time we are not indigenous, so how can we do this respectfully and authentically without cultural appropriation?

Of key importance is taking the guidance of our indigenous teachers, elders and colleagues. Indigenization or Reconciliation in education is not possible unless we are following the leadership of indigenous Teachers. It is important for us to be constantly self-reflecting and also checking in with our Indigenous colleagues for clarification and guidance. Here are some links for further exploration:

- <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/why-cultural-appropriation-is-disrespectful>
- <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/why-buying-authentic-indigenous-art-is-important>

Reflections For Educators on Cultural Appropriation:

- How well do I understand the difference between cultural appropriation and appreciation?
- How often do I check to see whether indigenous gifts or items are made by local indigenous people, benefitting local Indigenous People?

- Is worried about cultural appropriation holding me back from moving forward with reconciliation in my classroom? if so, who can I ask for help?
- How can I include indigenous people and leaders and teachers more in the work of indigenization or decolonization in my classroom?

Indigenization or Decolonization?

Higginbottom and many other academics prefer the term "decolonization" over "Indigenization" as a term to refer to the undoing of colonial harmful aspects of settler culture. Horsetheif (2017) doesn't like the term decolonization, as for him this term centers our conceptions on settlers, yet again. He prefers the term Indigenization, as he feels this is a better term to describe a process of settler culture learning from Indigenous ways of knowing and doing. As Horsethief explains in his "Thoughts on Indigenization" (2017), Indigenization is about conversations and developing relationships over time, creating spaces to actively engage Indigenous voices, learning deeply in partnership with a specific Nation or band through their language, culture, history, pedagogies and ways of knowing.

Barclay (2021) writes "If there is no decolonization there is no space for Indigenization or reconciliation. Colonialism is taking up all of the space and there is no room left."(p.4) This implies that she conceives of these terms as a kind of path towards Reconciliation. Throughout this website, I use the words decolonization, indigenization

and Reconciliation almost interchangeably to refer to the same process of learning from Indigenous peoples to live in better relationship with each other, the land, ourselves and all things. Ultimately, the best definition I have heard of Reconciliation is that it is a "spiritual journey." (Wright, 2023)

Question: What do I do with students and families who resist efforts of decolonization?

- address concerns through reflection: How/Do you feel about being forced to take this as a grad requirement? Why do you think schools are learning about Indigenous cultures, languages and ways of knowing?
- provide information on why we are decolonizing/indigenizing such as the historical context and learning about the legacy of residential and assimilationist schools.
- Inform learners/families of the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to action and UNDRIP. Our ministry has put it into action.
- work with your abed team and administrator to address the issues.

I know that in the First People's Principles of Learning, it states that "Learning Takes Time and patience" (FNEESC, 2006), however there are time constraints in colonial education, which creates tension. How can teachers reconcile these seeming contradictions? .

Higginbottom discusses this contradiction in her dissertation, noting "Within a system wrought with to-do lists, it is often contrary to an agenda to take time to learn together, nurturing a spirit of learning and true collaboration." Higginbottom, 2023, p.22) The new provincial curriculum in BC has removed the proscribed learning outcomes of the past, which allows educators greater flexibility in determining what learning outcomes they will address in their classes. This is directly connected to decolonization efforts in BC education. Reflect with your Indigenous Education support team about how we can slow down and take more time for deeper learning, collaborative learning, and experiential learning on the land.

Is it possible to decolonize, or authentically Indigenize, an inherently colonial education system?

This is the overarching question of inquiry which I am exploring in this website. Through my [literature review \(2023\)](#), I explored local examples of local allyship which show that movement towards decolonization within colonial systems is possible, but it requires taking guidance from Indigenous leaders/knowledge holders. As settlers, we need to take on a new role as apprentices/mentees under the guidance of Indigenous leaders. The journey requires humility, reflection, courage and the willingness to make mistakes., knowing that learning takes patience and time.

Reflecting on FNEESC's [First People's Principals of Learning](#) explored in Chrona's [Wayi Wah! Indigenous Pedagogies](#) (2022) is a great way to start!

Higginbottom (2023) discusses the tensions we feel as she describes "...the paradox of working in a colonial system while leading decolonial practices (Ahenakew, 2017). A rippled tension exists between the system of education and the ability of this system to correct symptoms of racism and inequities (p 15) How can we get curious and hold our ground in this discomfort?

Suggestions for further Reading:

- Battiste, M. (2013) *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit*. Purich Publishing.
- Higginbottom, G. (2023) Steps Toward Healing a Colonial System While Improving Equitable Experiences for Indigenous Learners K-12 in a BC Rural School District. *The Organizational Improvement Plan at Western University*, 373. Retrieved from <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/oip/373>
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Is it ok for non Indigenous people to teach about Indigenous topics?

Chriona affirms that is is "the work of educators in all parts of the education system to identify and support the needs and achievement of Indigenous learners...[and she validates the importance of] ensuring all learners and educators engage in learning about ... and from Indigenous Peoples" (2022,p.21)

While it is vital that non-indigenous educators learn from and take the guidance of Indigenous leaders, teachers, and knowledge holders, we do hold a responsibility to teach about Indigenous peoples and knowledges.

It is important to understand that the lack of awareness of Indigenous topics in public education is not solely the responsibility of our indigenous colleagues. Our indigenous colleagues already hold a tremendous responsibility in sharing their knowledge and teachings with diverse learners and colleagues. The scope of the harms of the past and current racist injustices requires all of us to contribute and share the responsibility of reconciliation. in fact not teaching about Indigenous topics is a form of racism and attempted genocide- erasure.

One important thing to consider is the distinction between teaching Indigenous culture and teaching about Indigenous culture. Non-indigenous peoples cannot teach indigenous cultures, as this would be cultural appropriation. However, we can teach about indigenous history, culture and traditions. We must always work under the

guidance of Indigenous leaders, using resources prepared by Indigenous knowledge holders for our use in the classroom.

How do I learn about Indigenous protocols?

Locally, Indigenous education support teachers are the best contacts in your school to help you understand the protocols involved in inviting Elders into your classroom and working with particular knowledges. Indigenous community leaders and teachers are the best sources of this information. If you don't have an indigenous educator at your school hopefully there may be a district indigenization coordinator such as we have here in school in my school district.

It is important to note that not all Indigenous knowledges can be shared in the public school setting. Some indigenous knowledges are considered sacred such as ceremonies, and can only be shared with special permission in certain contexts and following specific protocols. If you are not sure, the best policy is to ask.

Professor Joanne Archibald has important information about story work protocols on her website which would be an excellent resource for all teachers to review prior to implementing any story work in your classrooms.

See: <https://indigenoustorywork.com/1-for-educators/>

Gail Higginbottom also offers these "**Anti Indigenous Racism Protocols**" (2023, p120) which are a good starting place for all:

"In holding discussion and asking for vulnerability, engagement, and courage, it is important to develop protocols to guide the work in a good way. Through the Indigenous teachings of humility, respect, and honesty, these protocols will support shared learning.

- Stay engaged.
- Speak your truth.
- Experience discomfort.
- Expect and accept non-disclosure.

Note. The four guiding protocols are from *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools*, by G. Singleton, 2015, Corwin."
(Higginbottom,2023, p120)

Am I an Ally?

Unsettling ourselves takes patience and time...

In becoming allies or accomplices, we must take an anti-racist approach, which involves reflection, conversation, building relationships and deconstructing our colonial mindsets and institutions over time. As Southam(2021) and Klutzz et al.(2020) remind us, this is an “unsettling” and uncomfortable process. As Pearkes(2022) and James(2021) show us, this process involves taking action under the guidance of Indigenous leadership, being willing to make mistakes, try new things, and be vulnerable. Through this process of “unlearning and

learning”(Klutzz et al, 2020) we become transformed, creating new understandings about ourselves and our relationships to all things.

The book *Geography of Memory* (2022) exemplifies what it means for a settler to develop a good relationship with Sinixt people through patience over time. It is a chronicle of the growing relationship over the past 25 years that the author, Pearkes, has worked with the Sn̓ Ɂáɣkstx community, coming to better understand herself, Sn̓ Ɂáɣkstx People and also the land and all the beings that inter-relate here. The book is a story of transformation and of self-reflection in community, grounded in a particular place. It chronicles the traumatic dislocation of the Sn̓ Ɂáɣkstx from their territory, their resilience and resistance, and their recent homecomings. The book is a devotion of remembering, with no greater accolade than the introduction by Sinixt leader Shelley Boyd, who expresses “This book is a paradox in how it uses science, history, archaeology and geography to invoke the spiritual truth of our ancestors....This book is a medicine for the resulting generational trauma, and a true validation of our experience” (Pearkes, 2022, p.xi).

As non-Indigenous settler educators and leaders, we need to let Indigenous people take the lead in Indigenization/decolonization; we must follow their guidance in efforts towards Reconciliation. All of the literature explored emphasizes the fundamental tenant that Indigenous sovereignty, autonomy and self-determination is essence of Reconciliation. As Chrona discusses in *Wayi Wah! Indigenous Pedagogies* (2022), as educators, we need to move from “learning

about to learning from”(p115). The role of ally or accomplice is therefore also the role of student or even mentee/apprentice.

In many Indigenous stories, Coyote is shown to be a trickster character and someone who can change form, or transform. Maybe Coyote is calling us to be transformed from enemies into allies, then accomplices, and eventually, possibly to see ourselves as "kin" (Krawec, 2022)?

Taking Action (Chrona, 2022, p. 19)

- Be patient but not complacent with your learning...
- Commit to continued learning. Learn, reflect, share. Repeat Cycle....
- Recognize...discomfort...[but don't stop learning].
- Find people to encourage and support your learning.
- Educate yourself about local Indigenous Peoples and Nations...
- Learn about the Protocols where you live...

(For help with local protocols contact your local Indigenous Education Support Teacher).

Toolkits for Indigenous Allies:

- Treaty 7 Indigenous Ally Toolkit (Calgary Foundation, 2019)
- Indigenous Ally Toolkit (Swiftwolfe, 2019)

What is anti-racism?

"Reconciliation calls for us to understand how racist colonial attitude and policies have impacted Indigenous Peoples and continue to shape Canada." (Chrona, 2022, p.32)

Chrona defines racism as "a belief that a group of people are "less than" or in some way inferior based on the colour of their skin or their ethnicity or culture." (2022, p76) In Wayi Wah!

Indigenous Pedagogies(2022) she discusses both relational racism, overt racism such as

bullying or teasing, and systematic racism, which shows up when systems do not produce equitable results for different groups of people based on bias entrenched in the system itself.

In alignment with widespread calls towards anti-racism, *Wayi Wah! Indigenous Pedagogies*(2022) reminds us that the “uncomfortable”(p15) process of creating anti-racist education systems “is a journey...a long process...[which] asks us to examine the roots of systematic racism...[and] acting to eliminate racism”(p59). In her book, Chrona presents a model representing the progression of “Becoming Anti-Racist in Canada”(p60) which begins in fear, separation and denial and moves through a learning zone towards an area of growth, advocacy and action. (see Figure 1) Like Southam (2021) and others, she sees the development of anti-racism as a journey of transformation. It seems like the idea of “ally” is rooted more in the “learning zone”, while the concept of “accomplice” is in the “growth zone” of this model. Rather than seeing allyship as a singular concrete identity, a realization that anti-racism is a journey of learning and transformation towards Reconciliation seems to be a more helpful model.

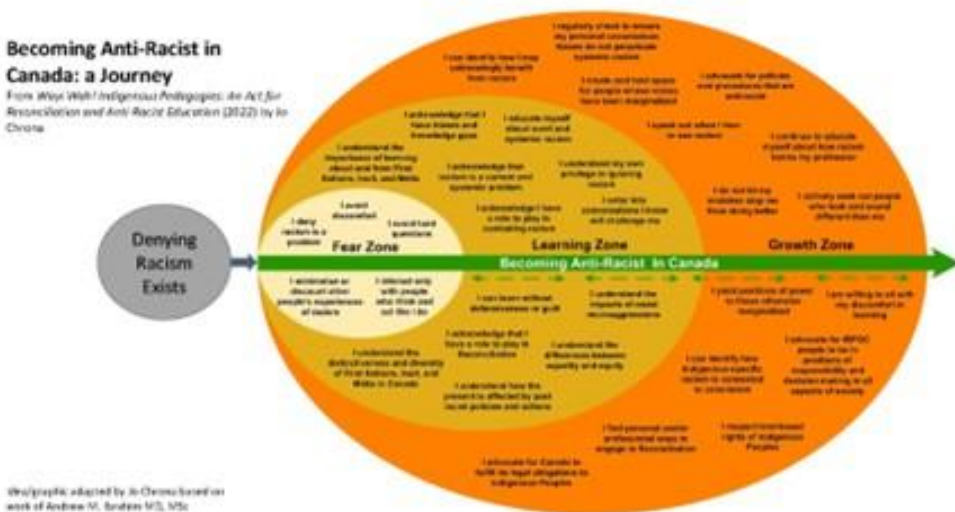


Fig. 1 - Becoming Anti-Racist In Canada (Chrona, 2023, p60).

The work of anti-Indigenous racism requires an investment of time, personal reflection, and shared vulnerability. To truly move a system forward, it is important to slow down and create time for questions and reflections. (Higginbottom, 2023, p. 73)

Questions for Reflection:

...we must look clearly at the achievement gap of Indigenous students and ask why. Why is this disparity here? We must look carefully at history and the institutions that raised and

educated us and ask what. What did we learn that we must now unlearn? What was missing and what can now be found? We must then look toward our collective responsibilities to ensure that the how, the how of fixing this gap, is addressed. (Higginbottom, 2023, p. 86)

What is equity?

Equity is acknowledging that we all don't start at the same place. Many of us have differences which require unique supports. In order to create a community that is welcoming to all we need to ensure that all people have access to needed resources and accommodations to ensure justice and well-being is equitable for all.

We know that Indigenous communities have faced and continue to face racism and other obstacles to education. (Chona, 2022) (Higginbottom, 2023) Corona discusses Equity when she talks about a common misconception of many settlers which is **"If I just treat everyone the same, there will be no racism."** This perspective often coexists with the idea that educators are culturally neutral or that the cultural perspectives and knowledges that are reflected in our systems are the only ones of value."(p64) Both Chrona and Higginbottom discuss the importance of Settler educators reflecting on our biases and cultural assumptions to ensure we are seeing clearly through a lens of equity. In her dissertation(2023), Higginbottom discusses the [annual equity scan](#) which she implemented in our school district to help identify places where the school system can improve by creating more Equitable education for all.

How do I learn more?

There are so many ways to learn more! The number one recommendation is to talk with local indigenous teachers, colleagues, elders and community members.

- Read books and articles. You can start with my annotated bibliography which I created to develop this website.
- Follow Indigenous leaders, artists, fashion designers, musicians, scholars and educators on social media.
- Attend local indigenous Community public celebrations and events of remembrance such as:
 - Truth and Reconciliation Day events on September 30th,
 - National indigenous Day events in June,
 - Missing murdered indigenous women and girls 2 Spirit + events in May and many other events throughout the year
- Volunteer to help at these events, or to sponsor Indigenous artists and guest speakers in your school or classroom.

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