Indigenous Education Dept

FAQs for Teachers

Here are some frequently asked questions:

Q: **Terms and Definitions**: "*I am not sure what terms I should use when talking about communities and members. Is it First Nations, First Peoples, Aboriginal or Indigenous?"*

A: The term "Indigenous" is the umbrella word that includes First Nations (status and non-status), Metis and Inuit. Other synonyms for Indigenous include "Aboriginal", "First Peoples" and the acronym "FNMI". While the term "Indigenous" is increasingly being used in place of "Aboriginal", both are still accepted. The term "Indian" is only used in a legal context (e.g. The Indian Act), and the term "Native" is really only acceptable when referring to the shoes. The term First Nations is often used to refer to a specific band. In Vernon, students who identify as "Aboriginal" could:

- Have a Metis ancestry
- Have an Inuit ancestry
- Have an unidentified Indigenous ancestry
- Belong to a local First Nation band (e.g. Okanagan Indian Band or Splatsin)
- Be a member of a First Nations elsewhere in the province or country
- Identify with their Indigenous heritage without having band membership (parent, grandparent, great-grandparent who belongs to a band or First Nation)

Q: **Acknowledgment of Territory/Traditional Welcome**: *"What does acknowledgment of traditional territory mean and why should I do it? When should I acknowledge territory? Is this the same as a traditional welcoming? Does an elder need to do this?*

A: Traditional welcomes and acknowledgements are an expression of recognition and respect. The words remind others about the harms Aboriginal people have suffered as a result of colonization, land expropriation and residential schools, and they respect the ethical principal of promise keeping and reconciliation. These acknowledgements are a way to recognize that we are meeting on land that is still inhabited by living traditional cultures, and they are only meaningful if you know whose land you are on precisely. Traditional welcomes are performed by people who are from the territory on which you are located, often an elder. However, the host of any public gathering such as a meeting, assembly or celebration may and should respectfully acknowledge the territory, and you may wish to use the following

wording: **“I would like to acknowledge that we live, learn and work on the traditional, unceded territory of the Syilx Okanagan people.”**

Q: **Integrating First Peoples Principles of Learning and Content**: *“Who can help deliver Aboriginal content in my classroom?*

A: As a part of the provincial curriculum, all teachers are expected to teach Indigenous content and perspectives in their classrooms. However, we recognize teaching unfamiliar material can be daunting, and we have three Indigenous Lead Teachers (Ben Louis blouis@sd22.bc.ca ; Sheryl Newton snewton@sd22.bc.ca & Amiel Logan alogan@sd22.bc.ca) who are able to support teachers with indigenizing learning in schools by collaborating and modelling lessons, as well suggesting resources. These Lead Teachers also offer workshops and other professional development sessions, in addition to helping connect schools with local community-based resource people. Think of these Lead Teachers as training wheels that help you get on your way in integrating Indigenous principles of learning, then slowly let go as you approach mastery. Please note that while your school’s Indigenous Support Worker (ISW) may have individual expertise to share, they are not expected to deliver curriculum as that is the teacher’s responsibility.

Q: **Integrating First Peoples Principles of Learning- Who can or should teach what?** *“Are we able to teach the kids about First Nations art or crafts? Are we allowed to tell stories about First Nations communities or teaching stories? What if I get it wrong?”*

A: Here are some guidelines that may help:

“It’s the curriculum” First Peoples Principles of Learning and Indigenous content are a part of the BC curriculum, in all subjects and at every grade level. It is completely expected that teachers will use Indigenous materials and perspectives. It is a shared responsibility that should not be left to only Indigenous educators, support workers or community members…There simply aren’t enough of us to teach everyone! We all benefit when non-Indigenous teachers learn about Indigenous history and peoples and share that knowledge and understanding with their students.

“Culture, not crafts” When there is meaningful and authentic learning that emphasizes recognizing cultural traditions, activities such as weaving, beading, and making dream catchers are perfectly appropriate; for example, if students are studying Anishinaabe traditions and culture, it would be great to teach about the purpose of dream catchers according to Anishinaabe teachings. In addition, it’s important that students realize that these cultural artifacts and teachings are not generically Indigenous, but are specific to certain peoples. Overall, it’s best to incorporate the creation of these artifacts not as a stand-alone activity but as a way of enriching student understanding about a particular Indigenous culture.

“Sharing Stories” While there are stories that are considered sacred and require permission to share, those are not the stories being widely circulated; Narrating or reading published Indigenous stories is recommended, as long as you take some care to ensure they are written or have been shared by

Indigenous storytellers. Again, generic Indigenous anything should be avoided; we should know these stories are authentic and from a particular nation. You may wish to use recommended resources from FNESC, AFN, ERAC or SD22/OKIB's own publication *Story of Our Ways*.

Above all, please don't avoid integrating Indigenous content because you are afraid of "doing it wrong." If you've used common sense, done some research, and have good intentions, few Indigenous people would take issue with any minor missteps. And when in doubt, there are colleagues, Lead Teachers and ISWs who can help steer you in the right direction.

Q: **Teaching about Residential Schools.** *"Residential schools are a difficult topic to address with adults and teens, so how can I teach it to young children? How should I approach this? Should I approach this?"*

A: Residential schools, though a challenging subject, is a part of the provincial curriculum. While teaching about this terrible time in our shared history can seem a heavy topic for our students, it is essential that we acknowledge the truth about the harm done to Indigenous peoples and cultures by government policies and societal indifference/racism. There are many reliable books and online resources that will help you to teach young students about residential schools in age-appropriate ways. Each year, Orange Shirt Day allows teachers to introduce this topic. September 30th Orange Shirt Day originated in Williams Lake in May 2013 when Phyllis Webstad shared her story as a way to help educate students about the history of Residential Schools.

Q: **Indigenous Support Workers (ISWs).** *"What is your job? Is an ISW the same as an EA? What supports and services do you provide?"*

A: ISWs provide enhanced academic, cultural, social and emotional support for Indigenous students. While ISWs can work one-to-one and in groups with Indigenous students needing extra academic support, they do not replace EAs, behaviour intervention specialists or other services all SD22 students are entitled to. This support is **in addition to** the services every student should receive if they have a need. Like EAs, ISWs may be working in classrooms, but they also have responsibilities that EAs do not have. The targeted funding the Indigenous Education department receives means that ISWs must report their daily interactions with these students, and we must be able to show we have continually offered support to all Indigenous students. In a nutshell, ISW's primary responsibility is to provide enhanced support to Indigenous students. They may also provide classroom cultural learning activities if it also enhances the service they provide to Indigenous students on their caseload, and this is up to the discretion of the ISW.

Some FAQs and answers were modified with permission from Surrey Ab Ed Department materials to fit local perspective.