

How can we embed Truth and Reconciliation in every school?

Eleven of the ninety-four Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) final report are specific to education. Call to Action 63, “*Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect,*” challenges Canadian education systems to focus on students’ understanding of Indigenous human rights and social justice initiatives. Non-Indigenous students are now beginning to learn about the truth of residential schools, treaties and other long-standing issues facing Indigenous communities such as lack of clean drinking water, housing and food shortages. Truth and reconciliation is a spiritual and emotional journey required of *all* students and educators – from the head to the heart – that will unfold differently for everyone.

This journey can be undertaken through the following strategies, and it is critical that experiences are brought back into the school and classroom:

- **Creating relationships with Indigenous peoples** by attending community events (e.g. National Indigenous Peoples Day, Louis Riel Day, Arctic Games, round dances, community meals) and having a critical conversation about relevance and meaning.
- **Learning from local Indigenous Knowledge Keepers** outside school walls in a culturally relevant space (e.g. medicine walks, living with the land, sharing circles, attending powwows, language camps).
- **Engaging in community outreach projects** that have compassion and comprehension at their core (e.g. Project of Heart, Orange Shirt Day, I am a witness, Walking With Our Sisters, Shannen’s Dream, Jordan’s Principle, The REDress Project).
- **Participating in experiential activities** that delve deeper into Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations (e.g. Imagine a Canada – National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, Indigenous Rights Blanket Exercise Workshop – KAIROS Canada, WE Schools – Indigenous Programming).
- **Evaluating individual and collective growth** using a holistic model that includes the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual aspects of life (e.g. Medicine Wheel, Indigenous Wellness Framework, First Nations Perspective on Health and Wellness).

As active participants in modelling reconciliation with their students, teachers need both professional development (PD) and a support network that provides safe places to share feelings of trauma, joy, anger, resolve, grief, and hope that they may experience along this journey. PD themes can include cultural competency and safety, the First Nations Mental Health First Aid course, holistic arts therapy and other areas that explore emotional and spiritual intelligence. The support network for non-Indigenous school districts includes an Indigenous Lead, who has meaningful awareness and knowledge of learning resources and cultural protocols. **Overall, Call to Action 63 goes beyond curriculum requirements, pedagogy and resources, and is critical to changing how generations of young people move forward together.**

For online resources and references please visit:
www.edcan.ca/facts-on-education

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