



Lesson Plans, Podcasts, and Discussion Prompts for Teachers Weaving Indigenous Knowledges into the Classroom

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A S S E R T

Research for Teachers in a Hurry

Published December 31, 2024

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DOI

<https://doi.org/10.29173/assert81>

Pages: 1-10

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ABSTRACT

Two years after the implementation of the Teaching Quality Standard number five (TQS 5), ten Alberta teacher education programs came together to examine how teachers in Alberta were weaving Indigenous knowledges into their classrooms. This article reports on the findings of two hundred and forty-seven surveys and thirty interviews with Alberta teachers. The findings indicate how Alberta teachers are gaining confidence in their foundational knowledge of Indigenous peoples and the important role of Indigenous team leads in schools. The article includes access to a website created from the research featuring lesson plans, podcasts, publications and discussion prompts for teachers weaving Indigenous knowledges into the classroom.

Keywords teacher education; Indigenous knowledges; Indigenous education; teacher resources; Indigenous teaching methods

How to cite this article (APA): Danyluk, P., Wessel, S., James-Thomas, S., & Trout, L. (2024). Lesson plans, podcasts, and discussion prompts for teachers weaving indigenous knowledges into the classroom. *Annals of Social Studies Education Research for Teachers (ASSERT)*, 6(2), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.29173/assert81>

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, Canada experienced a significant shift when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) issued the Calls to Action. These calls urged teachers to enhance their understanding and teaching of Indigenous histories, cultures, and perspectives to foster reconciliation and promote respect for Indigenous Peoples in the educational system. In Alberta, the 2018 Teaching Quality Standard (TQS) fifth competency mandates that all teachers develop and apply foundational knowledge about Indigenous Peoples in the kindergarten to grade 12 classrooms. This research aimed to examine how the TQS 5 is being integrated into classrooms.

THE RESEARCH

Ten teacher education programs in Alberta came together in 2020 to examine how their programs were weaving Indigenous knowledges into teacher education (Danyluk et al., 2023). Members of the research team included both non-Indigenous and Indigenous researchers. Following the examination of our own programs, we reached out to Alberta teachers to learn how the TQS 5 was being integrated within kindergarten to grade 12 classrooms. Drawing on both Indigenous and non-Indigenous methodologies through collective case study and storytelling, we gathered data from teachers using a survey, semi-structured interviews, lesson plans and podcasts. Two hundred and forty-seven teachers participated in the survey, and of those, 30 agreed to engage in a semi-structured interview. During the interviews, we asked teachers to share why they believe integrating Indigenous knowledges into the classroom is important, the challenges and successes they have encountered, and stories about when they believed they had successfully woven Indigenous knowledges into their teaching.

FINDINGS & IMPLICATIONS

In examining the survey data, we learned that the majority of respondents (56%) reported a foundational knowledge. Thirty-seven percent of respondents indicated they had some foundational knowledge, and only 7% reported having no foundational knowledge. While previous research suggested that teachers often lack the necessary knowledge, confidence, or support to integrate Indigenous knowledges into their teaching (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020), these survey results demonstrate that teachers are beginning to acquire the essential knowledge, signaling a positive shift towards more inclusive and informed educational practices. What is more encouraging is that many respondents emphasized that this foundational knowledge is constantly evolving, necessitating teachers to continually (re)learn and adapt.

Indigenous team leaders within schools play a crucial role in supporting teachers in this ongoing learning process. Indigenous team leads are teachers who have an in-depth knowledge of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing and are often Indigenous. Respondents highlighted the essential role Indigenous team leaders play in providing resources and methods for integrating Indigenous lessons into the classroom. Indigenous team leads offer guidance and help teachers verify their understanding before teaching a new concept. They further assist in the classroom, often leading ceremonial acts (e.g., smudges), which enrich the learning environments. This support instills confidence and humility in teachers, enhancing their teaching practices and efficacy. Consistently, the Alberta Teacher's Association (ATA, 2022) recognized the importance of Indigenous team leads not only in assisting teachers but also as key supporters of Indigenous students, who can see themselves

represented in the resources, learning experiences, and staff.

The research findings demonstrate that teachers are at the forefront of integrating Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing into the classroom. They have engaged in self-directed studies to learn Indigenous histories, cultures, and pedagogies, ensuring they can accurately and respectfully integrate these elements into their teaching practices. While this process is ongoing, teachers have made strides to weave Indigenous perspectives into various subjects, creating holistic learning experiences that respect and honour Indigenous cultures. This includes using Indigenous literature, incorporating traditional ecological knowledge in science lessons, and embedding cultural practices and languages into daily activities. Teachers shared that they often collaborate with Indigenous communities and leaders to ensure the authenticity and accuracy of the content. They described how they engage students in hands-on learning experiences, such as storytelling, art projects, and participation in ceremonies, to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of Indigenous traditions.

Delving into Indigenous pedagogy as a non-Indigenous educator can be intimidating. Yet, teachers have demonstrated bravery in acknowledging a gap in their understanding and humility by learning alongside their students. This commitment to continuous learning and cultural sensitivity is essential for building a more inclusive and equitable educational system.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS

The implications of this research highlight both the progress and challenges faced by teachers weaving Indigenous perspectives into their classrooms. While many teachers report having a foundational knowledge of Indigenous perspectives, they continue to struggle with the belief that only Indigenous teachers can authentically integrate these knowledges and that Indigenous perspectives should not be privileged due to Canada's multicultural nature (Scott & Gani, 2018). However, as noted by the TRC (2015), everyone, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, has been called upon to integrate Indigenous perspectives into the classroom. The inclusion of Indigenous perspectives by non-Indigenous people is a crucial part of reconciliation, as it promotes intercultural understanding and acknowledges the importance of Indigenous contributions to Canadian society. By actively participating in this process, non-Indigenous teachers help to dismantle colonial structures within the education system and contribute to a more inclusive and respectful learning environment for all students.

To share the research findings, we created a website entitled *Combatting Racism Towards Indigenous Peoples through the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in the classroom*.

<https://combattingracismtowardsindigenouspeoples.ca/>. The website offers twelve comprehensive lesson plans for a variety of grade levels, complete with resources that teachers can use or adapt to their needs. The lesson plans were reviewed by an Indigenous team lead teacher to ensure that resources are culturally appropriate, readily accessible and practical for classroom use. They feature curriculum connections, activities, case studies videos, slides, worksheets and assessments, focusing on local Indigenous perspectives as the recommended approach for authentically integrating Indigenous knowledges into the curriculum (Freeman et al., 2018). While the lesson plans are rooted in the perspectives of Alberta Indigenous communities, they can be adapted to reflect the perspectives and teachings of Indigenous Nations in other regions across Canada.

Table 1
Lesson Plans by Grade Level

Lesson Plan	Grade	Students
Conservation of Biodiversity	Grade 9	Explore how human action impacts species survival and variation
A Sense of Land	Grade 4	Consider the care of Mother Earth in protected spaces
Indigenous Garden	Grade 1	Design an Indigenous garden
Wild Word Keepers	Grade 2	Consider the differences between Western and Indigenous worldviews
Communicating Ideas About the Land	Grade 4	Connect with the land through storytelling
Traditional Métis Plants	Grades K-5	Explore Metis plants through recipes, nature walks, and journaling
Plants for Food and Fibre	Grade 7	Learn about plants important to Indigenous peoples
Wetlands	Grade 5	Examine the interaction between living and non-living things in wetlands
Nature Mosaic	Grade 4	Consider the geography, climate, geology, and paleontology of Alberta to appreciate how land sustains life
Art of Alex Janvier	Grade 5	Explore Indigenous art and its role in reconciliation
Patterning with Traditional Métis Sashes	Grade 1	Connect with math through patterning
Embracing Indigenous Stories Through Language	Grade 4	Learn about Indigenous languages through stories

The podcast series created from this research project delves into the personal journeys of Alberta teachers as they navigate the opportunities and challenges of weaving Indigenous knowledge into their classrooms. This series serves multiple purposes. Teachers can use the podcasts to self-reflect, gain insights into Indigenous perspectives, and reflect on their integration practices. The podcasts can also serve as discussion prompts for students, particularly in higher grade levels, to reflect on and consider Indigenous perspectives and knowledges. Moreover, these podcasts can fulfill multiple learning outcomes in the Social Studies and English Language Arts curricula by serving as provocations for discussion and critical thinking (Table 2).

Table 2

Podcasts and Discussion Prompts

Podcasts	Prompts for Student Discussions	Prompts for Teacher Discussions
Series Introduction	What stories have you heard about how your family came to Alberta?	What does it mean to weave Indigenous knowledges into your teaching?
Exploring Indigenous Knowledge through the Lens of Broken Promises: An Educator's Experience	Who is responsible for the broken promises of the Indian Act and what should be done to address them?	Is making students uncomfortable in their learning acceptable and if so, how do you decide what is appropriate?
Braiding and Weaving Indigenous Knowledge - A Tool for Combatting Anti-Indigenous Racism	How does two-eyed seeing connect you with the land?	How does weaving Indigenous knowledges into your classroom address racism towards peoples?
The Importance of Making Personal Connections with Indigenous Knowledge: A Music Teacher's Quest	How do Indigenous cultures ensure sustainability by using every part of the animal?	How can we use music to encourage discussions about Indigenous knowledges?
Embracing Indigenous Pedagogy: Lessons from an Educator on a Central Alberta Reserve	How can we use the concept of Wahkohtowin in our classroom?	How can Wahkohtowin be used to establish a classroom culture?
Empowering Students Through Indigenous Knowledge Integration	How was Métis finger weaving used in Métis culture?	Why was their Indigenous ancestry hidden from some children while they were growing up?

Enseignante engagée pour l'intégration des savoirs autochtones en Alberta	De quelle manière tes sorties dans la nature peuvent-elles contribuer à ta compréhension des histoires et des enseignements présentés dans l'art autochtone?	Comment encourager la collaboration et les échanges interdisciplinaires grâce à l'art autochtone?
	How can outdoor exploration contribute to your understanding of the stories and teachings found within Indigenous art?	In what ways can we inspire collaborative projects and cross-curricular connections through Indigenous art?
Nature's Classroom: Reimagining Education with Indigenous Perspectives	Where do we find math in nature?	How can we teach about land-based learning without leaving the school grounds?
Lessons on Integrating Indigenous Knowledge into Science Curriculum	What role did breaking down Indigenous connections with the land play in colonization?	How can we shift the script from talking about Indigenous peoples from the lens of trauma and marginalization to that of resilience and strength?
From Métis Plants to Classroom Plans - One Teacher's Journey	What are some traditional Indigenous medicines created from plants?	What resources can we draw upon when we are unsure about what information is ours to share in the classroom?
Series Conclusion	How has your perspective changed after listening to the podcasts?	How will you use this resource in your classroom?

The lesson plans and podcasts also foster a community of practice among teachers. They can share their experiences, listen to others, and learn together, creating a collaborative environment for professional growth. This community of practice allows teachers to communicate their successes and challenges in integrating Indigenous perspectives, providing a platform for sharing strategies and ideas. This collaborative approach supports individual teacher development and builds a collective understanding and appreciation of Indigenous perspectives in education.

The research team continues to add lesson plans and podcasts to the website. The lesson plans are currently being translated into French for French teachers.

Q & A WITH Patricia Danyluk, Samara Wessel, Saria James-Thomas, and Lisa Trout

Question #1

Teacher's Question:

How would a non-Indigenous school without Indigenous team leaders support their teachers to bring Indigenous knowledge systems in the classroom? What other types of professional development must be provided?

Patricia Danyluk and colleagues' Response:

If a school does not have Indigenous team leaders, they would likely still have access to an Indigenous team lead or consultant through their school board. If this is not the case, the principal may know of connections with Knowledge Keepers or Elders. When speaking to an Elder, protocol must be respected. Learn Alberta has more information on Elder protocol.

The Alberta Professional Learning Consortium has a variety of workshops for teachers wanting to develop foundational knowledge. The Werklund School of Education offers several Indigenous education MEd Interdisciplinary certificates that can be taken alone or as part of a Masters degree.

Question #2

Teacher's Question:

Most teachers in Alberta are non-Indigenous, but not all are aware of their positionality as settlers. Some may themselves be impacted by “colonial structures within the existing educational system” depending on their heritage and lived experiences. What is their unique and personal interaction with the TRC Calls to Actions and the intersection with TQS 5?

Patricia Danyluk and colleagues' Response:

Many Canadians lack basic information about Indigenous peoples. Teachers can develop a foundational knowledge including through self-study, courses and workshops. In fact, 15% of the teachers who responded to this study reported developing their foundational knowledge through self-study.

Settlers have been part of colonial system that promoted a deficit discourse which blamed Indigenous peoples for poor educational outcomes and discredited Indigenous knowledge systems. The TRC brought to light many truths and called upon education systems to take action.

All teachers have a role in addressing the TRC Calls to Actions. Calls to Action 6 to 12 and 62-65 call upon us to make changes to curriculum, funding and teaching practices. TQS 5 intersects with the TRC as it requires Alberta teachers to “develop and apply knowledge about Indigenous peoples for the benefit of all students” (TQs 5).

Question #3

Teacher's Question:

The “intercultural understanding...and knowledge about the importance of Indigenous contributions to Canadian society” must consistently be mandated and resourced in teacher professional development. How should we ensure that?

Patricia Danyluk and colleagues’ Response:

Ensuring all teachers understand Indigenous contributions to Canadian society will require financial support for professional development. This research found that workshops, courses, self-study and study with Elders and Knowledge keepers had the greatest impact on their professional development. Key to this is building connections with local Indigenous communities, continuing to fund the role of Indigenous team-lead teachers, and training and hiring more Indigenous teachers.

Question #4

Teacher’s Question:

How should school leaders support teachers to become allies who identify as agents who can challenge anti-Indigenous racism in the curriculum and who can “dismantle colonial structures within the education system” in ways that take the pressure off the Indigenous teacher leaders? And how, if at all, should this support differ for teachers of White settler heritage versus those who have recently immigrated to Canada and whose histories are perhaps not implicated in the same ways?

Patricia Danyluk and colleagues’ Response:

Allies have an important role to play in Indigenous education and reconciliation. Educating teachers about Indigenous knowledges cannot fall only on the shoulders of Indigenous peoples, and as one teacher who responded to this study stated, an Elder told them, “We need ALL educators to include Indigenous knowledges into their teaching practices.” The Elder also pointed out that it is ok to make mistakes as long as we learn from them. The key to supporting allies is letting them know that they are not alone and providing opportunities for them to partner with other allies so that they can collaborate and strengthen their efforts.

We are all implicated in the work of reconciliation and whether a teacher is a newcomer or a long-time settler, we all have a moral obligation to address the TRC Calls to Action in our work

Question #5

Teacher’s Question:

What evidence would you look for that teachers could learn to identify which would be hallmarks of well-integrated or respectfully-integrated practices or curricula?

Patricia Danyluk and colleagues’ Response:

Respectfully integrated practices and curricula would be evident in a teacher’s alignment with Indigenous worldviews. Indigenous worldviews include a holistic perspective, an understanding of the interconnectedness of all living things, connections to land and community, the dynamic nature of the world and shared power with others including students (Alberta Education, 2005, pp. 11-12). In teaching this, the teacher should ground themselves in local knowledge of the Indigenous peoples whose land they are teaching on. Further, the teacher should demonstrate humility and

acknowledge where the knowledge they share comes from. Finally, a teacher with respectfully integrated practices should demonstrate kindness to students and colleagues.

Note

This research received funding from a SSHRC Insight Grant.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Patricia Danyluk

I am currently an Associate Professor at the Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary. I live and work on the traditional territories of the peoples of Treaty 7. I am also a K-12 teacher with a specialization in Social Studies and History. Although I was born in Calgary, I grew up in a remote community in northern Manitoba and spent the early part of my career working in remote First Nations and Métis communities. My ultimate goal is to prepare education students for the realities of the classroom. In my own professional development, I enjoy learning from my colleagues and students.

Samara Wessel

I am a doctoral counselling psychology student at the University of Calgary in Treaty 7 Territory on the Traditional Lands of the Niitsitipi (Blackfoot). My ultimate goal is to support the field of psychology in providing ethical and culturally safe psychological services. I am interested in how counselling psychology can support Indigenous Peoples and communities seeking self-determination of child welfare. Particularly, how psychology can support the implementation of Bill C-92. I have been spending my time learning about how Māori child welfare legislation can inform and guide developments in Canadian legislation. Outside of my professional pursuits, I am a partner to a software engineer, I enjoy role-playing games and fantasy novels, and craft beers.

Saria James-Thomas

I am currently a psychology student at the University of Calgary, located on Treaty 7 Territory, in Canada. I am also a teacher with experience teaching Grade 6 and currently work as a substitute teacher for junior high and high schools. My ultimate goal is to become a psychologist specializing in working with equity-deserving youth, particularly those from BIPOC and 2SLGBTQ+ communities. I am interested in exploring the mental health of these populations and the factors that help them thrive. My own professional development efforts have been focused on attending workshops centered on these populations, reading books by Indigenous authors, and engaging with content creators from these communities. Outside of work, I enjoy exploring food spots, catching up with friends, and travelling, especially to Mexico.

Lisa Trout

As a French Immersion teacher in Calgary, Alberta, and a Master's student at the University of Calgary on the Traditional Territories of the Niitsitipi (Blackfoot) and the people of Treaty 7, I am committed to engaging, research-informed content for educators. I aim to empower teachers to incorporate food education into the classroom, fostering connections between students, their communities, and the land. My professional development has centered on land-based learning, ethical spaces, and creating cross-curricular resources that integrate storytelling, history, and food literacy. I am an avid snowboarder and play various sports. In quiet times, I practice yoga, paint, write, and read with a latte. My 18 years of teaching experience include everything from preschool to Grade 8, French immersion, ESL, and cooking classes in Canada and abroad.