

# 12 Learning from Indigenous Knowledge in Education

## Chapter Outline

This chapter examines the role of Indigenous knowledge in education. In particular, it explores how Canadian educational policies have gone from devaluing Indigenous knowledge in educational institutions to including Indigenous knowledge as a foundation for learning. In addition, the chapter brings an understanding of the colonial legacies of educational institutions to the reader with the hope of contributing to a better future.

Indigenous knowledge is intimately connected to the land and represents locally- and culturally-specific knowledge. Storytelling is used to pass on this knowledge and, traditionally, was always a part of children's daily living. The role of creation stories as a way to direct how to live in the natural world is also stressed. The importance of ancestral languages in this oral tradition is emphasized, as are other practices for communicating knowledge including drumming, dance, and song.

The chapter then focuses on the colonizing of Indigenous education. The goal of assimilation through education—specifically through the residential school system—is highlighted. Included in the discussion is analysis of the abuse that children and youth suffered at these institutions, as well as the resulting intergenerational trauma for individuals, families, and communities. The chapter discusses the issue of genocide within the context of residential schools and associated policies and legislation. There is a discussion of recent court proceedings, in which many former students of residential schools brought criminal charges against school administrators and teachers, as well as Prime Minister Stephen Harper's formal apology on behalf of the government in the House of Commons in June 2008. This section of the chapter concludes with a discussion of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and some of the challenges associated with its implementation.

The chapter concludes by discussing current educational trends that support Indigenous knowledge in the learning experiences of Indigenous and, in some cases, non-Indigenous children and youth. Also noted in the chapter are the future benefits of Indigenous knowledge systems to Canadian society as a whole. The inclusion of Indigenous world views, values, languages, culture, and approaches to learning in mainstream school curricula significantly broaden the learning experience of all students. One example can be found in the use of land-based learning. Reconciliation between Indigenous people and the rest of Canada requires widespread awareness and understanding of a shared colonial history that has produced very different outcomes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission are affording an opportunity to address this shared colonial history.

## Learning Objectives

- To understand the role of Indigenous knowledge in traditional education
- To understand the impact that colonization had on Indigenous knowledge
- To identify the strategies that resulted in Indigenous knowledge becoming part of the knowledge base used in educational institutions in Canada
- To recognize the intergenerational legacy of residential schools
- To recognize how the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action can be used to address the colonial past and present

## Study Questions

1. Why is it that Indigenous children and youth do not experience the same success with schooling as their non-Indigenous counterparts?
2. What is unique about Indigenous knowledge?
3. Why is storytelling important to Indigenous knowledge?
4. Which methods can be used to pass on Indigenous knowledge?
5. Why was the residential school system created, and what were the conditions in these schools?
6. Based on what you've read, what stands out most for survivors of residential schools?
7. What was the goal of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission?
8. Choose one of the Truth and Reconciliation's calls to action. Has it been successfully implemented? If so, how? If not, how could it be implemented in the future?
9. How have universities in Canada attempted to "Indigenize" the academy?
10. How can Indigenous knowledge be incorporated into school curriculums?

## Additional Resources

### Readings

- Lund, Darren E., and Paul R. Carr, eds. 2015. *Revisiting the Great White North?: Reframing Whiteness, Privilege, and Identity in Education*, 2nd ed. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- McKegney, Sam. 2007. *Magic Weapons: Aboriginal Writers Remaking Community after Residential School*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.
- Mihesuah, Devon A., and Angela C. Wilson, eds. 2004. *Indigenizing the Academy: Transforming Scholarship and Empowering Communities*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Milloy, John. 1999. *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.
- Styres, Sandra. 2017. *Pathways for Remembering and Recognizing Indigenous Thought in Education: Philosophies of Iethi'nihstenha Ohwentsia'kekha (Land)*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Tomlins-Jahnke, Huia, Sandra Styres, Spencer Lilley and Dawn Zinga eds. 2019. *Indigenous Education: New Directions in Theory and Practice*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press.

## Websites

Beyond 94: Where is Canada at with reconciliation?

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/beyond-94-truth-and-reconciliation-1.4574765>

This site provides an update tracking of the TRC's 94 calls to action

Statistics Canada. *The Educational Attainment of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada*.

[http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-012-x/99-012-x2011003\\_3-eng.cfm](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-012-x/99-012-x2011003_3-eng.cfm).

This page provides statistics on the educational levels of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. <http://www.trc.ca/>

This website provides access to the TRC and includes findings, documents, reports and a wealth of other information.