EDIE 4100 Learning Journey

*Indigenization and Inclusive Education*

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A Purposeful Invitation

When I contemplated how to address Indigenization and inclusive education, the first item that came to mind was Shelley Moore's video, "The Evolution of Inclusion: The past and future of education" (Moore, 2018). Since the Truth and Reconciliation movement began in 2007, many Canadians have been trying to move forward and educate people about the history and legacy of the residential schools' system (Gov't BC, n.d.). In the video, Shelly readdressed the concept of exclusion, segregation, integration, and inclusion in an evolutionary approach. Inclusion is the present-day approach to reaching all students in education, and this includes Indigenizing our classrooms. However, when Shelley challenged educators to think about the *future* of inclusion, I connected to how this can relate to Indigenization.

It is not enough to simply "include" Aboriginal culture in the occasional classroom lesson and label it as Indigenization; there needs to be a purpose. Shelley discusses the need to go back in time and consider anyone who has experienced institutionalization (Moore 2018). The Aboriginal families who had members attend a residential school have experienced institutionalization and, therefore, exclusion. For many Canadian First Nations, the experience of a traditional "white" school triggers discomfort and trauma. When we consider Aboriginal students' inclusion from the perspective of a haunted past, we will see how critical it is to acknowledge their culture when approaching their learning.

Canadian schools may be working towards Indigenizing their classrooms, but there needs to be more than posters on the wall. I witnessed a daughter and her mother seek healing by returning after school to a room where I had been working as a TTOC. The girl had not been back to the school since she left in grade 4. She had dropped out of school in the sixth grade, explaining that she had never felt welcomed as an individual in the class. The teacher did not, nor tried, understand her culture or what she needed to succeed. The girl's mother explained that she was now in grade nine and gave school one more try. Before their arrival, I was trying to get my notes complete for the classroom teacher, and for some reason, ended up there longer than I had intended. Had I not stayed, I would not have been there to welcome them into the classroom or hear their story. I am honoured that they shared their story with me and feel that I may have helped them with their healing process through my discussion with them. I told the daughter that I was proud of returning to school after such a painful experience.

At the end of her video, Shelley challenges us to think about the future of inclusive education. The point that resonates with me is when she said the students need to have a purpose, "Breathing the same air is not enough" (Moore, 2018). Although Shelley refers to inclusion involving learning disabilities, perhaps the next step involves racial inclusion and Indigenous inclusion. Since most Canadian schools lie within the unceded territory of First Nations' groups, we need to recognize their place in Canada's history. We need to acknowledge their purpose and teach this to all students in the classroom. According to Adam Joyce, the goals of integrating Aboriginal perspectives for Aboriginal students are for them to "develop a positive self-identity through learning their histories, cultures, traditional values, contemporary lifestyles, and traditional knowledge." The goals of integrating such a perspective for non-Aboriginal students are "to develop an understanding and respect for the histories, cultures, traditional values, contemporary lifestyles, and traditional knowledge" (Joyce 2017). For so many years, Canadians denied the consequences of residential schools. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has issued a formal apology, but now it is time to include and acknowledge Aboriginal teachings as part of our Canadian schools. The primary step to take is inviting Aboriginal parents and elders into the schools to teach their traditional ways through stories.

However, I think this is going to take careful consideration. I know from experience how tentative I am to enter a place where I was previously not welcome. All of the salmon-related Math equations or Totem Pole art means nothing if it does not come from a place of sincerity. It is going to take time for many Aboriginal parents to feel safe in a traditional school setting. Inclusion needs to begin with an inviting attitude and a natural interaction between the cultures, without any air of obligation or "I am inviting you to speak to my class because I have to." When welcoming and relationships reach a relaxed state, the Aboriginal curriculum will come from the heart. I recall reading about the "third ear" in an academic paper, "it's respect for the storyteller and what that person is trying to communicate and the connection between the listener and the teller" (Lewis, 2015, p. 60). If teachers consider Indigenous Education as inclusion, we need to take a UDL approach, planning our lessons to reach all learners, with both learning and cultural differences. There is no single script for including Aboriginal content in our classrooms because there are many diversities between the many First Nations groups. Still, the one thing that will help achieve success is to make sure our invitations are sincere. We listen to traditional stories with our hearts, considering history from an Aboriginal perspective.

Reflection: *\*****(reflection on Visual Artifact included at the end of this section)***

I realize that we cannot force Aboriginal parents and community members to enter our schools and tell stories of traditions and culture. Healing requires time. As a teacher, I know that although I may experience resistance when inviting Aboriginal parents into my classroom, I need to consider this from their perspective. Even if only one of my invitations is accepted, it may lead to future interactions and knowledge sharing. Just as I would not give up on a student with a learning disability, I will not stop trying to make Aboriginal family members feel welcome in my classroom. Inclusion is all-encompassing.

I am encouraged by the results I have experienced with my early attempts at inclusion and Indigenization. My first activity was to invite a local band member from Canim lake to do a drum making workshop for my intermediate class at Lac La Hache Elementary. The presenter brought her drums and told the stories behind them. She explained the meaning of the drum's materials and sang us a song. Afterward, she spent two days helping each student make their drum. Now that I am more aware of the importance of oral storytelling for Aboriginal culture, I attempt to use it when employed as a teacher on call. I had one Aboriginal student in an Earth Science class working on a large reading comprehension/note-taking assignment. He was utterly lost and frustrated, as this was not the way he learned effectively. Even though I needed to help other members of the class, I spent some time with him. I tried to turn some of the questions into little stories to understand the outcomes required. He was quite willing to take this auditory approach and worked quite well on the sections we completed together. As I thought about this student, I decided to create a visual about Aboriginal Inclusion:

***Artist Statement/Reflection for Visual Artifact Presentation:***

My classroom experience has allowed me to practice many of the approaches I have learned about inclusive education. While breaking through barriers of connecting with Aboriginal students has often been challenging, I am thankful for the successes that I have had. I decided to draw a visual that I could use as encouragement when working on inclusion and Indigenization in my classroom; it is included on the main web page of this section. I resonate with the concept of listening with a "third ear," so it is at the epicentre of my drawing. The drawing represents the traditional inclusion diagram with an Indigenous theme. Within the inclusion circle are the words Invitations, Sincerity, Stories, and Perspective, along with words and phrases that explain them further, written within the smaller circles of inclusion. This drawing gives me quick insight and a reminder that including Aboriginal students and Indigenizing my classroom needs to come from the heart; both mine, and all students in the classroom and school community.

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