

First Nations Métis and Inuit Education Gathering Highlights

Ensuring First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education for All Students

Background

The First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Gathering continues as a vision to bring Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators, education partners and members of our communities together to share our experiences and stories as we began our collective journey to reconciliation through education. Over the span of 3 years and 3 Gatherings the movement has gained strength, depth, and momentum as the relationships and commitments grow. Close to 300 delegates participated in the 2018 Gathering.

Highlights of the third Gathering included inspiring keynotes from Minister Feehan, Tom Jackson, Patti LaBoucane-Benson, Hovak Johnston, and Stan Wesley. Delegates gave high praise to the inclusion of cultural ceremony and traditions throughout the Gathering with the Grand entry, pipe ceremonies, Elder teachings, Inuit throat singers (Sila Inuit Throat Singers) and cultural protocols to honour First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples of Alberta.

We were especially excited to have an enhanced focus on Inuit culture, knowledge and education this year and to have showcased the *Indigenous People's Atlas of Canada* education resources including the giant floor map unveiled for the first time anywhere in the country. We also displayed the newest Legacy of Hope exhibit *Bi-Giwen: Truth Telling from the 60's* with accompanying workshops for the first time in Alberta. There was a beautiful Indigenous Market Place offering unique opportunities to shop and support local Indigenous artisans.

Goals for the First Nations Métis and Inuit Education Gathering included:

- an increase in awareness and understanding of foundational knowledge of First Nations, Métis and Inuit for the benefit of all students;
- an increase in capacity building to meet the learning needs of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students;
- an increase in understanding how to engage and collaborate with First Nations, Métis and Inuit leaders, elders, communities and organizations;
- an increase in awareness and understanding of the professional practice standard(s) and competencies leading to a commitment to action.

All goals for the Gathering were achieved with a high degree of satisfaction by delegates. Delegates also shared recommendations for the 2019 Gathering, which will be held April 10-12, 2019, that will support future planning. These recommendations include the importance of including ceremony and time to learn with Elders, more time to engage with presenters during the sessions so that a greater understanding on how to apply learning can be gained. Dr. Tupper's observations and calls to actions confirmed the importance of learning foundational knowledge, truth telling and truth knowing, that was evident at the Gathering sessions and in the keynote addresses. Additionally, we were all given a strong message by Dr. Tupper, keynotes and presenters to take action on our learnings from the Gathering.

We were honoured to have Dr. Jennifer Tupper, Dean of Faculty of Education, University of Alberta serve as the first witness at our Gathering. Dr. Tupper visited many of the sessions to witness our learning and share with us her thoughts and calls to actions at our closing. The following excerpts are from Dr. Tupper's remarks.

- There can be no reconciliation without truth telling and truth knowing.
- This is important work – your presence here is heartening. These gatherings and conversations were not happening two decades, or even really a decade ago. But there is a shift, a desire to learn and walk together.

- An image that was used often over the last three days is that of the braid – the strands of hair woven together, intersecting. It is a powerful reminder that we are stronger in this work when we are together, learning from one another guided by the wisdom of the Elders and knowledge keepers who guide us in this journey.
- Tom Jackson – so amazing, brought us a message of love, hope and a better day, and the power of education and educators to be the bridge between the truth that is the past and reconciliation that is the future.
- Patti Laboucane-Benson offered us important insights into the present moment – the systems of despair that affect the lives of Indigenous peoples in real ways – the over-representation of Indigenous children in care, over-incarceration of Indigenous peoples. She spoke the truth of colonization, racism and historic trauma but also offered a sense of hope for healing our damaged relationships.
- Both Tom and Patti shared foundational knowledge with us, and the importance of foundational knowledge emerged for me over, and over, and over again. In the beautiful work of the ATA’s stepping stone project; the 4 Seasons of Reconciliation Resources; the Albert Professional Development Consortium curricular support materials.
- What is the importance of foundational knowledge based in truth-telling? It is corrective to the dominant narrative of Canadian history; shifting historical consciousness, as a principle of reconciliation.
- The young women from O’Leary High School, part of the ‘Braided Journey’s Graduation Coach Program” spoke about the importance of foundational knowledge, (for themselves and for others) and of safe and culturally enriched gathering spaces, of a sense of community and belonging in their schools, and inclusive activities for all learners in the school building.
- Young people, Indigenous and Settler, have many insights, we must learn to listen to them, but first we must create the conditions in which they can be heard. Young people will educate us as much as we will educate them.
- Speaking to the heart and then moving to the head. Once we are able to shift minds we can shift practice. As Stan reminded us earlier this morning, the shift is coming from our young people – we need to nurture and foster this. Ask questions of them and ask questions of ourselves.
- The themes of resilience and resurgence have been woven together in many powerful ways. Last night, Hovak lived these in her work on the Inuit tattoo revitalization project. For the women, the resurgence of this cultural practice has meant healing. We can take from this the deep importance of connecting with culture, but also connecting with others through culture. Truth and reconciliation work is and must be deeply relational. We must be attentive to those moments when we are requiring Indigenous culture, language, and ways of knowing and being to fit into western colonial frameworks. Hovak reminded me that there must be intentionality in our learning. That we must find the support we need to do this work and not dwell on the support we don’t have.
- So much of the last three days has been about inspiring the how of teaching, deconstructing and reconstructing knowledge systems. It has also been about leading. Supportive administrations make a difference. Turning the mirror on ourselves. To consider our truths, to learn from, with and alongside Indigenous peoples. In words of 60s scoop survivor Frank Delorme, featured in the Legacy of Hope Foundation exhibit, “we cannot fix the past.” But as educators we have responsibilities to learn from the past in the present moment and create the conditions for a different future.
- Stan Wesley – “Reconciliation is both and outward and inward process”. What are you going to do when you leave here? Actions are the most important things.

Calls to Action As We Leave:

- Engage in anti-colonial curriculum making in your classrooms and schools.
- Extend an invitation to parents and community members to walk with you on this learning journey. Create opportunities for them to engage and engage again.
- Honour and make space for student voices in this journey. Listen to what they have to say and be prepared to take action.
- Bring a friend, or two or more, to this Gathering next year.

- Actualize your learning from the last two days together in your personal and professional lives.
- Cultivate an ethos of reconciliation in your classroom, schools, and divisions. Opting out cannot be an option.
- Engage in difficult conversations, conversations that will shift historical consciousness and that speak back to racist and colonial ways of thinking, doing, and being.
- Step outside your comfort zone. Be courageous.

“A Challenge for Education, and for public education in particular, is learning how to practice reconciliation on a daily basis such that it becomes woven into the fabric of schooling and curricula the way assimilation once was...Education for reconciliation must do more than bring awareness, it must bring about a change of intentions and actions” (Furo, 2017)

The Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard

Quality superintendent leadership occurs when the superintendent’s ongoing analysis of the context, and the superintendent’s decisions about what leadership knowledge abilities to apply, result in quality school leadership, quality teaching and optimum learning for all students in the school authority.