



MASS Journal

Spring 2024

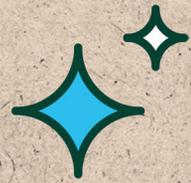
The official magazine of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents



Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Doing



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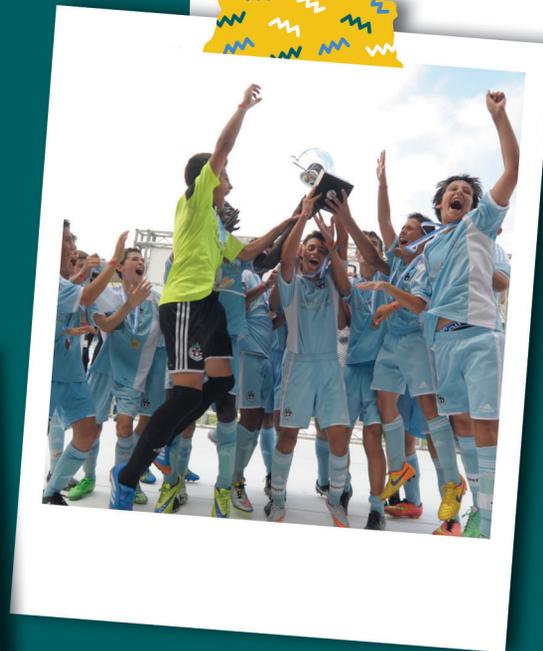
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50 Monterey Road
Winnipeg, Manitoba R2J 1X1
Phone: (204) 219-7059
E-mail: barb.isaak@mass.mb.ca
Web: www.mass.mb.ca

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President & CEO

Jack Andress

Operations Manager

Shoshana Weinberg
sweinberg@matrixgroupinc.net

Publisher

Jessica Potter
jpotter@matrixgroupinc.net

Editor-In-Chief

Shannon Savory
ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net

Editors/Social Media Managers

Jenna Collignon, Paul Adair, Kaitlin Vitt

Finance/Administration

Lloyd Weinberg, Nathan Redekop
accounting@matrixgroupinc.net

Director of Marketing & Circulation

Lloyd Weinberg
distribution@matrixgroupinc.net

Sales Manager

Jeff Cash
jcash@matrixgroupinc.net

Matrix Group Publishing Inc.

Account Executives

Colleen Bell, Jackie Casburn, Rob Gibson, Jim Hamilton, Scott Hendren, Touhid Khan, Frank Kenyeres, Sandra Kirby, Charlie Langsford, Andrew Lee, Brian MacIntyre, Shaun Minnett, Lynn Murphy, Caitlin Nakamura, Vlada Radchenko, Wilma Gray-Rose, Luke Stevens, Joseph Ukaoha

Advertising Design

James Robinson

Layout & Design

Cody Chomiak

For advertising information contact

Matrix Group Publishing Inc. at
(866) 999-1299.

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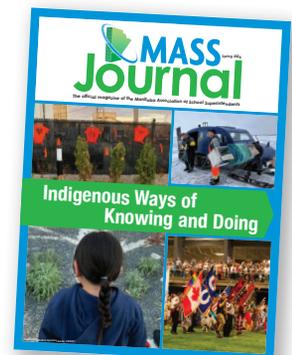
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On the cover: Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Doing, as embedded through the “Mamāhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With” Framework, are a foundation to the education system. On this issue's cover are a selection of photos depicting various moments from articles in this magazine. See the articles on pages 20, 23, and 26 to learn more about them!



Moments of Joy and Fulfillment

Welcome to the 2024 spring edition of the *MASS Journal*. As we transition into the brighter days of spring, we look forward to the remaining months of the school year being filled with many moments of joy and fulfillment.

This issue of our journal highlights many ongoing efforts to value and engage with Indigenous ways of knowing and being. The articles reflect a collective commitment to Truth and Reconciliation by illuminating the transformative power of valuing our diversity, engaging community, making inclusion a priority, and focusing on equity. I invite you to immerse yourself in the stories shared by several of our dedicated colleagues from across Manitoba.

Lorie Henderson and colleagues share their multifaceted approach to enriching educational experiences through extended family involvement and land-based activities. Lisa Minaker highlights the role of a Lead Cultural Proficiency and Languages Teacher in nurturing Indigenous knowledge, languages, and perspectives in the Lord Selkirk School Division. This dedicated teacher inspires a collective effort to foster a more inclusive and equitable learning community.

Sherri Denysuik shares Seven Oaks School Division's two-decades long journey of empowering Indigenous identities and excellence supported by the wisdom of Elders and the active participation of the community. Donald Nikkel's contribution from Lakeshore School Division reflects on the transformative potential of land-based learning and the challenges of assessing Indigenous ways of learning and being with conventional evaluation metrics.

Brett Schmall and Leanne Peters discuss how the Hanover School Division, guided by its Elders and Knowledge Keepers, incorporates Indigenous knowledge systems and pedagogies to foster a more inclusive and responsive learning environment.

Lastly, the Winnipeg School Division's Indigenous Education Team describes the influence of its Professional Network of Indigenous Educators, Indigenous Way of Life Teachers, Divisional Kookum, and Circle of Indigenous Grandparents in shaping educational practices and policies to build a sense of belonging and empowerment among Indigenous youth.

These articles describe diverse approaches, yet an interconnected insight into the profound impact of culturally inclusive and community-oriented practices that incorporate Indigenous knowledge, languages, perspectives, and pedagogies by engaging elders, families, and the larger community to co-create the learning journey with students and staff.

Christian Michalik
Co-President



Moments de joie et d'épanouissement

Bienvenue au numéro du printemps 2024 du bulletin *MASS Journal*. Alors que les journées ensoleillées du printemps se font plus nombreuses, nous nous réjouissons à l'idée que les quelques mois qui restent à l'année scolaire soient remplis de moments de joie et d'épanouissement.

Le présent numéro met en lumière de nombreux efforts soutenus visant à valoriser les façons autochtones de connaître et de faire, et d'y participer. Les

articles reflètent un engagement collectif envers la vérité et la réconciliation en mettant en lumière le pouvoir transformateur de valoriser notre diversité, de mobiliser la communauté, de faire de l'inclusion une priorité, et de mettre l'accent sur l'équité. Je vous invite à vous plonger dans les histoires racontées par plusieurs de nos dévoués collègues de partout au Manitoba.

Lorie Henderson et ses collègues partagent leur approche à multiples facettes pour enrichir les expériences éducatives grâce à la participation de la famille élargie et aux activités inspirées de la terre. Lisa Minaker souligne le rôle d'une enseignante principale en matière de compétences culturelles et de langues dans le perfectionnement des connaissances, des langues et des perspectives autochtones au sein de la Division scolaire Lord Selkirk. Cette enseignante dévouée inspire un effort collectif pour favoriser une communauté d'apprentissage plus inclusive et plus équitable.

Sherri Denysuik nous fait part du parcours de la Division scolaire Seven Oaks qui, depuis deux décennies, s'efforce de promouvoir les identités autochtones et l'excellence en s'appuyant sur la sagesse des Anciens et la participation active de la communauté. La contribution de Donald Nikkel, de la Division scolaire Lakeshore, porte sur le potentiel transformateur de l'apprentissage inspiré de la terre et sur les défis que pose l'évaluation des modes d'apprentissage et d'existence autochtones à l'aide de mesures d'évaluation conventionnelles.

Brett Schmall et Leanne Peters discutent de la façon dont la Division scolaire Hanover, guidée par ses Anciens et ses gardiens du savoir, intègre les systèmes de connaissances et les pédagogies autochtones pour favoriser un environnement d'apprentissage plus inclusif et réceptif.

Enfin, l'équipe d'éducation autochtone de la Division scolaire de Winnipeg décrit l'influence de son réseau professionnel d'éducateurs autochtones, des enseignants du mode de vie autochtone, des grands-mères (Kookum) au sein de la division et de son cercle de grands-parents autochtones dans l'élaboration de pratiques et de politiques éducatives visant à créer un sentiment d'appartenance et d'autonomisation chez les jeunes Autochtones.

Ces articles décrivent diverses approches, tout en offrant un aperçu interconnecté des répercussions profondes des pratiques culturellement inclusives et axées sur la communauté qui intègrent les connaissances, les langues, les perspectives et les pédagogies autochtones en faisant participer les anciens, les familles et la communauté dans son ensemble à la création du parcours d'apprentissage avec les élèves et le personnel.

Christian Michalik
Co-président

Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Doing



Les façons autochtones de connaître et de faire

On behalf of the Government of Manitoba, I am pleased to bring greetings to the members of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS). As Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning, I endorse the active work of MASS in your leadership of embedding equity and quality throughout the public education system, specifically through early learning, Indigenous education and mental health and well-being. MASS supports our shared work and responsibility to ensure public schools and childcare facilities are safe places where every child matters and every child is set up for success.

Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Doing, as embedded through “Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With” – An Indigenous Education Policy Framework, are a foundation to the education system. Manitoba is committed to Indigenous and equity-based policies and research related to Indigenous education and training, equity, and inclusion. Ensuring that all children are able to learn in and about their own cultures and languages is a priority for the department of Education and Early Childhood Learning. The new Assistant Deputy Minister of Indigenous Excellence in Education will lead this important work along with expanding Treaty Education across Manitoba and increasing Indigenous and Indigenous Language teacher recruitment through the lens of “Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With.”

Our department is dedicated to working with educators and families to improve educational outcomes, support students and families, and prepare Manitoba's children for the careers and challenges of the future. This work would not be possible without the advice, guidance, and recommendations of members of MASS. Thank you for your continued leadership towards Truth and Reconciliation and to ensuring children across Manitoba can reach their full potential.

Nello Altomare
Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning

Au nom du gouvernement du Manitoba, je suis heureux de saluer les membres de la Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS). En tant que ministre de l'Éducation et de l'Apprentissage de la petite enfance, j'appuie le travail soutenu de la MASS dans le cadre de votre leadership visant à intégrer l'équité et la qualité dans l'ensemble du système d'éducation public, en particulier par l'apprentissage précoce, l'éducation autochtone, et la santé mentale et le bien-être. La MASS appuie notre travail commun et notre responsabilité de veiller à ce que les écoles publiques et les garderies soient des lieux sûrs où chaque enfant compte et où chaque enfant est dirigé vers la voie de la réussite.

Les façons autochtones de connaître et de faire, telles qu'intégrées au symposium « *Mamàhtawisiwin : Les merveilles de notre héritage* » – *Un cadre de politique en matière d'éducation autochtone* sont la pierre d'assise du système d'éducation. Le Manitoba s'est engagé à mettre en œuvre des politiques et de la recherche axées sur les Autochtones et l'équité dans le domaine de l'éducation et de la formation autochtones, de l'équité et de l'inclusion. L'une des priorités du ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Apprentissage de la petite enfance est de veiller à ce que tous les enfants puissent apprendre sur et dans leurs propres cultures et leurs propres langues. La nouvelle sous-ministre adjointe de l'excellence autochtone en éducation dirigera cet important travail, tout en déployant l'éducation sur les traités dans l'ensemble du Manitoba et en intensifiant le recrutement d'enseignants et d'enseignantes autochtones et de langues autochtones dans l'optique « *Mamàhtawisiwin : les merveilles de notre héritage.* »

Notre ministère se consacre à la collaboration avec les éducateurs et les familles afin d'améliorer les résultats scolaires, de soutenir les élèves et leurs familles, et de préparer les enfants du Manitoba aux carrières et aux défis de l'avenir. Ce travail ne serait pas possible sans les conseils, l'orientation et les recommandations des membres de la MASS. Nous vous remercions pour votre leadership continu en faveur de la vérité et de la réconciliation et pour votre volonté de permettre aux enfants du Manitoba de réaliser tout leur potentiel.

Nello Altomare
Ministre de l'Éducation et de l'Apprentissage de la petite enfance

TABLE OFFICERS:



Christian Michalik
Co-President
Superintendent
Louis Riel School Division



Jason Young
Co-President
Superintendent/CEO
Beautiful Plains School Division



Krista Curry
Past President
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Celia Caetano-Gomes, Metro
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Troy Scott, Metro
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Pembina Trails School
Division



Lorie Henderson, North
Co-Superintendent
School District of Mystery
Lake



Mathew Gustafson, Southwest
Superintendent/CEO
Brandon School Division



Dan Ward, South Central
Superintendent
Garden Valley School
Division



René Déquier, Southeast Interlake
Assistant Superintendent
Division scolaire franco-
manitobaine (DSFM)



Tyler Moran, At-large
Assistant Superintendent
Interlake School Division



Thelma Nice, At-large
Assistant Superintendent
Frontier School Division



Leanne Peters, Professional Learning
Assistant Superintendent
Hanover School Division

STAFF:



Barb Isaak
Executive Director



Karen Wohlgemuth
Executive Assistant

MASS provides leadership for public education by advocating in the best interests of learners and supports its members through professional services.

MASS believes that our mandate is to be *leaders of learning*, in our local school systems and in the broader domains of provincial, national and global public education. MASS believes a quality education empowers the whole child to constructively participate in global society.

We model learning that is:

- active and visible;
- based on robust research;
- tested through purposeful application in the field;
- evaluated using a wide range of meaningful data;
- responsive/supportive

We take responsibility for our own continuous learning and the learning of everyone we lead:

- creating and ensuring safe, supportive, inclusive and challenging environments;
- ensuring essential learning for each and every child;
- preparing others to go beyond our own learning.

We are guided by our learning in shaping policy and practice to achieve what is best.

MASS believes that *improved achievement and well-being for all of our students requires a shared commitment to raising both equity and quality.*

- A conscious and persistent commitment to equity, system-wide and across sectors, leads to poverty reduction, greater inclusion and an appreciation for the riches that diversity brings.
- A purposeful and sustained commitment to quality education for every student increases the capacity for teaching, learning and leading throughout the system.
- A strong grounding in literacy and numeracy and a rich learning experience involving inquiry, curiosity, creativity and artistic expression enables all students to achieve success and to flourish in life, academics and career.
- A respect for and openness to authentic youth voices and support for meaningful student action are critical for building capacity and self-efficacy in our student

MASS actively works towards *equity and quality throughout the public education system, with a special focus on three action areas:*



The **Early Learning Committee** will take leadership to ensure that MASS:

- Advocates for full implementation of the Calls to Action in the MASS position paper on Early Childhood Education.

The **Indigenous Education Committee** will take leadership to ensure that MASS:

- Builds capacity in MASS and school divisions to address the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action.
- Promotes ever increasing academic achievement, graduation, school completion and positive life outcomes for Indigenous students, informed by collective inquiry into evidence.
- Actively supports the teaching of Indigenous perspectives, corrective history and culture and the use of Indigenous languages.

The **Mental Health and Well-Being Committee** will take leadership to ensure that MASS:

- Advocates for implementation of a comprehensive provincial Children and Youth Mental Health Strategy.
- Collaborates with Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning to develop tools and indicators for assessing the well-being and well-becoming of students in schools.
- Pursues inter-sectoral liaisons with public and mental health organizations and agencies.
- Contributes to a national voice on mental health through Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) and through input into the Canadian Mental Health Strategy.
- Promotes Mental Health Literacy in mental health for all educators and pre-service educators.
- Sharing of Mental Health & Well-being paper with community and provincial partners. ■

One Activity at a Time: Building Parent, Grandparent, and Extended Family Involvement

Extended family and community members joined in at a family bowling event during summer programming for an afternoon of food and fun. Photos courtesy of Caelin Webber.

By Lorie Henderson, Co-Superintendent; Kelley Taite, Numeracy District Lead; & Caelin Webber, Literacy District Lead, School District of Mystery Lake

The School District of Mystery Lake acknowledges the lasting impact intergenerational trauma has on our families and community.

To provide effective education, we recognize the work that needs to occur to build healthy school relationship with our families. We also know that this cannot happen solely during the traditional school day. Building connections requires a commitment to long-term planning for lasting relationships. Drawing from the “Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With” Framework, we focus on meeting the call to promote parent, grandparent, and extended family involvement. Through our land-based family camps, summer programming for families, and strong

“Change moves at the speed of trust.” – Jo Chrona

relationships with Family Outreach and Community Connectors, Curriculum Services, and School Administration, we are able to integrate Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing with students and families at the centre. We want to ensure families see themselves as important partners in their children’s education.

School-year activities

Intentional ongoing planning throughout the school year is vital to ensure resources, commitment, and

community support. The school district team meets regularly to develop programming that is based on family feedback and some established yearly events and traditions. A proactive approach ensures family engagement, empowerment, and voice. Our year-at-a-glance includes family camps, Halloween Pumpkin Carving, Full Moon Ceremonies, family movie nights, community feasts, Families and School Together Programs, Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada Giant Floor Map Night, and, new this year, the Spring Fling



A young participant at one of the summer camps took the initiative to organize a traditional giveaway for families.

Dance. Families also participated in the School District Strategic Planning evening and a luncheon with Former Chief Cadmus Delorme where they discussed empowerment and the impact of choices. Individually, Community Schools deliver a variety of family-focused activities, such as open-gym nights, camping escape rooms, minute-to-win-it games, family fitness classes, and traditional medicine teachings. We see the activities grow as the relationships with families become stronger.

Land-based family camps have taken on a couple of different purposes. Initially, families were invited to traditional-focused sessions at a ceremonial site where opportunities included local corrective history, connection to identity and the land, sweet grass teachings, tipi teachings, traditional games, smudging, bannock-making, and the option to participate in a sweat. In conjunction with a grant from the RCMP, complete camping kits were given to each family that participated. Our land-based family camps have now grown to include an in-town location called kiskinwahnākwē askiy (The Land of Learning). The in-town location allows for more frequent and accessible opportunities for all-season programming. The activities are designed to promote mental wellness and traditional learning, while providing opportunities for honest conversation and a sense of belonging. Some take-away activities include bonding blankets, traditional medicines, family

A family participating in a family camp activity making a bonding blanket to take home. Often when making these blankets, conversations between families come naturally.



artwork, and bannock and jam. We end our family camps with the teaching and practice of a giveaway ceremony. By providing a safe space, families feel comfortable sharing knowledge and expertise with the entire group.

Summer activities

Although schools may run for only ten months, relationships need to be nurtured year-round. We recognize that many of the families do not have access to resources to go on a vacation, so the school district takes the opportunity to remain engaged with families. This is a reciprocal relationship: families can experience family fun activities, and district staff are able to maintain connections through summer activities. This programming is made possible through dedicated district staff; although some are technically on vacation, many staff volunteer their time to support these programs. They see the value of building

and sustaining relationships and want to remain connected to the families.

Additionally, strong community partnerships are essential to support summer

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 - Number of participants;
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 - Leadership;
 - Commitment;
 - Donations;
 - Participant Input;
 - Roles and responsibilities;
 - Flexibility; and
 - Community support.

activities and often lead to positive interactions between families and the greater community. Many times, businesses and service groups show a vested interest beyond financial support. Using existing school and community venues allows families to explore local recreational opportunities. Summer events include waterpark fun, mini carnival, bike rodeo, bowling and jumbo games. To ensure that the whole family participates in these events, an adult family member is required to attend. This has become an entry point for families to extend beyond their immediate members. The requirement has not negatively impacted participation but has instead increased involvement.

Previously, we held a BINGO; however, parents showed up without their children, as they thought it was an adult-only event. Upon reflection, we named the subsequent activity “BONGO” instead, which piqued curiosity with many families. Prizes included games, household necessities, cleaning supplies, food, and novelty items. Another popular event was the Back to School “Shopping.”

Volunteers collected clothing, school supplies, and backpacks, many of which were recycled from other schools or donated by community members. School supply lists were provided, and families had the opportunity to choose from the gathered items, which alleviated stress and allowed families to feel good about the start of the new school year.

We recognize the power of families and schools working together; this is why the district has focused on building relationships with families, students, and the greater community. Family participation usually averages between fifteen to twenty families or up to two hundred and fifty participants, depending on the activity. All events are free to attend, transportation is provided, and good food is a must. There is always a generous variety of snacks throughout activities and a delicious meal to follow. Don't forget the tea! Door prizes or gifts are also given at each activity, and no one goes home empty-handed. This practice aligns with traditional Indigenous philosophy of giving.

While these events are meant to be happy, be prepared for difficult

conversations. Building connections with families means that you need to be ready to listen and advocate for them when needed. They trust you enough to share their challenges; sometimes all they want is a listening ear and non-judgement. Approach these situations with humility and embrace the fact that they are confiding in you.

Although these activities undoubtedly require large amounts of resources (time, money, and commitment), their impacts on home-school relationships as well as support among parents has grown immensely. At the end of each activity, even though a lot of energy has been spent, the heart is full. To the district team, true success is when the families take ownership of the event, and we learn from them. ■

Lorie Henderson is Co-Superintendent; Kelley Taite is the Numeracy District Lead; and Caelin Webber is a Literacy District Lead of the School District of Mystery Lake. This article was submitted on behalf of the team members who make these events possible for our families.



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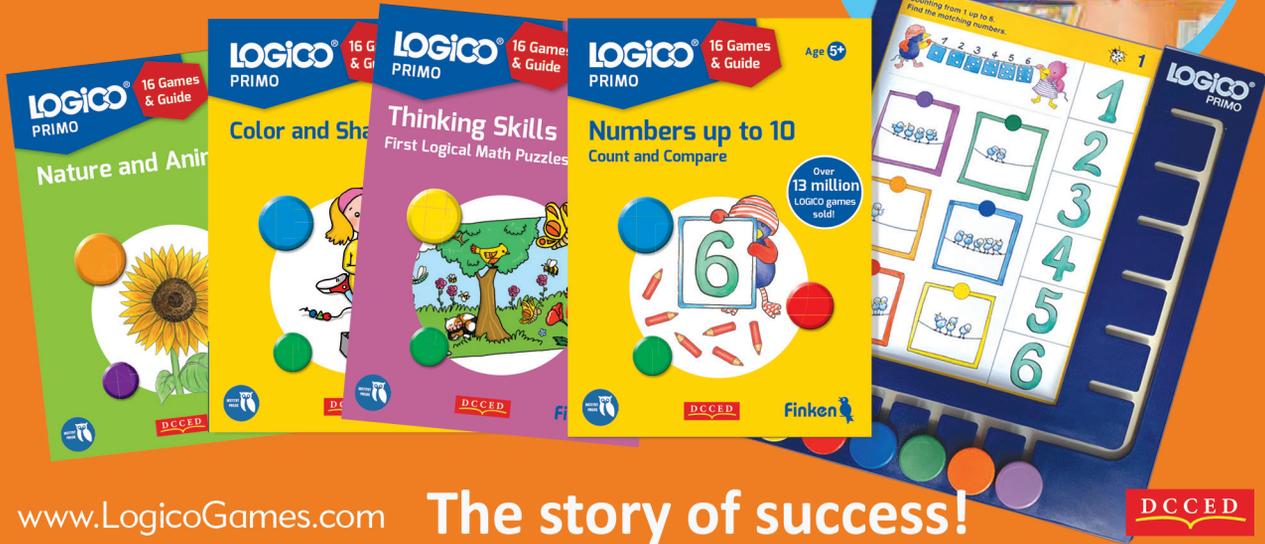


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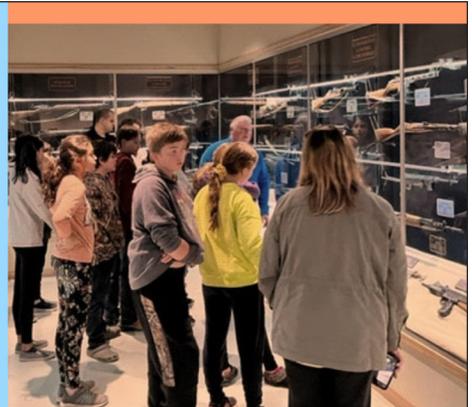
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Building Bridges: The Impact of a Lead Teacher in Promoting Cultural Understanding and Equity

By Lisa Minaker, Lord Selkirk School Division

The goal of truth and reconciliation in Lord Selkirk School Division (LSSD), as in all Manitoba school divisions, is to foster understanding, empathy, and respect among all students. The Indigenous population within LSSD is predominantly First Nations (Anishinaabe or Inninew) and Red River Métis. This reflects in approximately 36 per cent of self-declared students in our buildings. We are also situated close to Brokenhead Ojibway Nation, and many of their students attend our high school and middle schools. Recognizing this, we have been working towards creating a more inclusive and equitable education system that supports the success and well-being of all students. Efforts towards reconciliation have been aimed towards promoting dialogue and healing between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. In LSSD various initiatives have been applied to incorporate Indigenous pedagogy, cultures, histories, and languages in our classrooms and schools.

We are highly committed to integrating Indigenous perspectives into classroom programming in meaningful and authentic ways. In fact, our divisional strategic plan, which was presented to staff in 2021, has clearly identified “Know Your Learner” as being the heart of the plan, and crucial in considering the very important work that needs to be done. We were very aware that this wouldn’t be easy and recognizing the need to support our schools with this commitment, we believed it was essential to onboard a dedicated Lead Cultural Proficiency and Languages teacher. As a result, Jacquie Bercier, an Indigenous teacher who has worked within LSSD for 15 years, was hired to help fill this very important role.

One may wonder what “cultural proficiency” means. What is the role of a cultural proficiency lead teacher? If you were to have a conversation with Jacquie, she would suggest that cultural proficiency refers to the ability to interact effectively with people from different cultures and backgrounds. A lead cultural proficiency teacher must possess a deep understanding of the diverse cultural histories, traditions, and experiences of Indigenous peoples and other marginalized communities. They must be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to foster an inclusive and respectful learning environment. One of Jacquie’s primary responsibilities within LSSD is to promote cultural awareness among students, teachers, staff, and parents. By fostering cultural awareness, Jacquie helps to create a safe space for dialogue and deeper understanding.

To promote truth and reconciliation, it is essential to integrate Indigenous perspectives and histories into the curriculum.



A student seated, observing a display for Truth and Reconciliation Day.



Jacquie Bercier, an Indigenous teacher with Lord Selkirk School Division, at the Butterfly Garden Ceremony, Ruth Hooker School.



Jacquie leading a workshop with staff at Walter Whyte School. Photos courtesy of Lisa Minaker.

When considering this position and how it could look, it was determined that teachers required additional support in this area and that the lead cultural proficiency teacher would play a crucial role in organizing and facilitating the professional development of our educators. Jacquie is a wealth of knowledge, and she provides resources, training, and guidance on incorporating Indigenous perspectives into teaching practices. By equipping our teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills, Jacquie empowers them to create inclusive and culturally responsive classrooms. She ensures that the curriculum reflects the diverse experiences and contributions of Indigenous peoples, challenging stereotypes and promoting a more accurate representation of history. This is done by facilitating workshops, training sessions, in school

residencies and on-going discussions, that encourage individuals to reflect on their own biases and assumptions. This additional support has allowed our teachers to build a better understanding of the “Mamāhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With” Framework, and how they can better incorporate it into their classrooms. Jacquie also screens learning materials and literature for teachers and categorizes them to make these resources easily accessible.

There is critical importance in partnering with Elders and Indigenous Knowledge Keepers when initiating school-based programming that involves truth and reconciliation. Jacquie would be the first to say that knowing your community is crucial and that the relationships formed within the community are the driving force that determines what you are able to accomplish.

Jacquie acts as a bridge between the school division and the broader community, as truth and reconciliation cannot be achieved solely within the school walls. In her role, Jacquie collaborates with Indigenous elders, community leaders, and local organizations to develop partnerships and initiatives that promote cultural understanding and healing. It is for this reason that when considering the four strategies as outlined in Manitoba's Indigenous Education Policy Framework, the strategy LSSD is focusing on with the most rigor is Authentic Involvement. A huge emphasis has been put on inviting community members into our classrooms to help incorporate cultural teachings and meaningful experiences for our students. LSSD participates in a wide variety of special events and activities including community feasts, Grandmother's Walk, P.A.S.S. (Promoting Aboriginal Student Success) Annual Gathering, Orange Shirt Day, Indigenous Peoples' Day, and drumming workshops, to name only a few.

There are many strategies that our schools are using to infuse Indigenous perspectives into existing programming and to encourage Indigenous youth to have pride in their culture and identity. One initiative that LSSD is extremely proud of is the *Promoting Aboriginal Student Success* (PASS) Youth Leadership Team which runs out of The Lord Selkirk Regional Comprehensive Secondary School, and the Junior PASS Council which runs out of Ecole Selkirk Junior High. These two student groups unite to learn about the seven Grandfather Teachings, the Medicine Wheel, and the importance of Mino Bimaadiziwin from a local Cultural Teacher and Elder/Knowledge Keeper. These groups then share their knowledge and teach others about Indigenous Culture and issues within their school communities. Both groups serve as platforms for nurturing youth leadership. This affiliation empowers our Indigenous students and allows them to see themselves as valued, successful, and contributing community members. In addition, these students, with the assistance of Jacquie and teacher-facilitators, organize the



Jacquie singing a Travel Song at the Butterfly Garden Ceremony, Ruth Hooker School.

yearly divisional PASS Celebration that honours all our Indigenous Graduates and Indigenous Leadership members. Students and staff from our feeder schools are invited to attend this special full day event which showcases not only the achievements of our Indigenous Graduates, but also cultural performances from local organizations.

LSSD has an active Indigenous Academic Achievement & Indigenous Knowledge Keeper Committee consisting of one to two representatives from each school. It is led by Jacquie and guided by an Elder and a Knowledge Keeper in our community. This committee meets four times a year and works on initiatives that span across the division. We also have eight schools within our division that are participating in the Indigenous Knowledge Keeper Program. Each school is required to have three teachers who help to organize the program and deliver it to their school through a variety of events and activities.

Through this program, Elders and Knowledge Keepers are invited into our schools to participate with the school community during Feast time (Winter Solstice, Spring Break up, Summer Solstice, and Fall Gathering). Elders offer smudge, blessings of the food, and explain the importance of the Feast and gathering of community. In addition, there are several Elders and Knowledge Keepers who are committed to working within our schools to help build teacher capacity about Indigenous culture and world views. Jacquie collaborates with Indigenous elders, community leaders, and organizations to develop partnerships and initiatives that promote cultural understanding and healing. Our schools recognize that involving these community members as extensions of our school communities will help us to have a better understanding of First Nations and Metis perspectives within our area. These partnerships and relationships which have formed as a result have been extremely successful for our students, staff, and community.

In the journey towards truth and reconciliation in LSSD, as in many divisions, we still have a lot of hard work ahead of us. Our staff has a strong understanding of the why of this work and we are now working on the how. Jacquie has been instrumental and an invaluable asset as her expertise, guidance, and support have been critical in helping our teachers. By promoting cultural awareness, integrating Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum, supporting professional development, facilitating community engagement, and providing emotional support, Jacquie has played a vital role in fostering understanding, healing, and reconciliation within the school division. With positive relationships that have been developed, we have gained increased understanding, acceptance, and a desire to learn more. We have worked diligently to ensure that every child in LSSD sees themselves and their culture reflected in our schools. ■

Lisa Minaker is the Assistant Superintendent for Lord Selkirk School Division.

Seven Oaks Traditional Graduation Pow Wow
Grand Entry. Photos courtesy of Sherri Denysuik.



Honouring and Celebrating Indigenous Excellence in Seven Oaks School Division

By Sherri Denysuik, Seven Oaks School Division

Over the past two decades, honouring Indigenous excellence has been a priority in Seven Oaks School Division. This has been a slow and steady journey towards unlearning the narratives of settler superiority and Indigenous inferiority, to relearning the narratives of Indigenous resilience, courage, and strength. Collectively we are working to expose and understand the truths of this place, now called Canada. This work includes acknowledging our dark history, as well the colonialism that is still ever present. In Seven Oaks we continue to explore notions of reconciliation, which includes taking positive actions to bring counter-narratives to the forefront that highlight Indigenous

strengths, resilience, and dreams for the future. These actions have grown out of community involvement and collaboration. On-going priorities within Seven Oaks School Division include, language revitalization and preservation, reclamation of spaces, holistic learning and well-becoming, land-based learning and Indigenous leadership and representation.

"In my lifetime, I have seen the worst of education during my 10 years in residential schools. And now as an elder, I can say with pride that I have seen the best in education particularly during this past decade with Seven Oaks, where Indigenous children and youth are growing up with a sense of identity, belonging and seeing the strength and value in our Indigenous ways of knowing and our ways of being. My hope

for the future of education is steadfast." – Elder Mary Courchene, Residential School Survivor and Thriver.

A paradigm shift – Indigenous learning for all staff

Deepening Indigenous learning for all staff in Seven Oaks has been guided by Elders in Residence, Elder Mary Courchene and Elder Dan Thomas, both of whom have been deeply committed to offering their cultural knowledge, gifts of language, teachings, and on-going support. The gifts they share continue to nourish our community with inspiration, hope, kindness, and learning. Seven Oaks students, staff and community have also had the opportunity to learn alongside many other Elders and Knowledge Keepers,



Indigenous Youth Leadership students at the Aki Medicine Wheel Garden.

who help to ground the learning and promote learning through language. The continued goal has been to deepen our learning around what it means to live “the good life,” Mino Pimatisiwin and to recognize the celebration of “Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With.” This is a shift towards a paradigm of learning as “wonder,” where children and youth are immersed in Indigenous worldviews that help them understand how we develop curiosity and creativity, and teachings connected to the good life of well-becoming and balanced growth in the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual areas of their lives. This Indigenous paradigm results in Indigenous peoples challenging entrenched colonial ways while also seeking common ground. This includes a balance of walking

alongside settler systems; a balance that requires two-eyed seeing, two-eared listening, and the disposition to both challenge and collaborate with non-Indigenous leaders and staff.

Collaboration in support of Indigenous excellence has strengthened over the years among our diverse range of staff. Fostering this learning begins with our senior leadership superintendents’ team, school administrators, teaching staff who are both Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies and accomplices to support this work. Professional development at our annual divisional day for all staff has seen an amazing array of speakers over the years, some which include Dr. Pam Palmater, Clayton Thomas-Muller, Kevin Chief and most recently Tomson Highway. In addition, professional development

in schools continues to include a focus on learning from Elders, Knowledge Keepers and Indigenous community members who share their knowledge and perspectives. The focus on Indigenous excellence in Seven Oaks is given priority with the goal of impacting classroom communities where staff and students understand that Indigenous learning is for all learners.

Connection through community

Building Indigenous excellence in the Seven Oaks community is of utmost priority and an incredible example of that is our Annual Graduation Pow Wow which will celebrate its 15th year in June 2024. We have seen tremendous growth over the years with the thousands of people who come out for our vibrant celebration of Indigenous life, food, dance, music, artists, and crafts that is a true one-of-a-kind community event for all nations. The pow wow clubs in schools are comprised of children and youth from all backgrounds. These clubs create true kinship magic that respects and honours Indigenous values. This annual celebration has become a community staple and a tremendous way to celebrate Indigenous and non-Indigenous grads from all our high schools, adult learning centres and post-secondary programs like the Community-based Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (CATEP) and Career Ready.

Heads held high

In February of this year, Seven Oaks celebrated our Fifth Annual Indigenous Youth Gathering. This incredible gathering saw 450 youth in Grades 7 to 12 come together for a full day of inspiration through stories, dance and joy at the Burton Cummings Theatre. The day began with a message of encouragement from Premier Kinew, followed by powerful RED Talk speakers, hearing from the likes of Kevin Chief, Lenard Monkman and Trechelle Bunn to name a few. Students cheered and clapped alongside exceptional performances from Mikey Harris and his siblings Jacob and Cienna, Kelly Chinchilla and her daughter Rylee and many others. Indigenous excellence shone through our wide range of participants, youth holding their heads

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high, building connections, and seeing themselves reflected in the brilliant role models presenting before them. This was an exciting day focused on celebrating Indigenous youth, celebrating who they are, who they've always been and most importantly, who they are becoming.

Growing language through cultural traditions and land-based learning

A priority for Seven Oaks is to understand the responsibility of land, language, and culture. Language revitalization and preservation has emerged through our Anishinaabemowin program, a Kindergarten to Grade 5 Ojibwe Bilingual Program at Riverbend Community School. Anishinaabemowin programs can now be found at our middle years levels and will be moving into the senior years next year. We are strengthening the bridge between these levels by sharing language speaking staff and forging partnerships with First Nations communities as a way of building capacity to revitalize language among our students and staff. We are

promoting relevance and deepening language learning through ceremony, cultural teachings, and connection to land-based experiences. Essential to this work is Ozhaawashkwaa Animikii-Bineshi Aki Onjo Kinimaagae' Inun, our land-based learning centre (Aki).

With the wonderful base at the Aki Centre, Indigenous excellence is further supported by time and space being carved out, to slow down and learn alongside and be in relation with the land. The Aki Centre is also a symbol of land-back both in terms of the restoration of the land to its original state of tall grass prairie and reclaiming the use of land and connections to the earth that is rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing and being that fosters reconciliation as the foundation in a way forward that is good for everyone.

A light shining for all

In Seven Oaks School Division our doors are open, the lights are on, and we are celebrating Indigenous excellence and brilliance in a beautiful array of ways. Indigenous representation

and leadership have become part of who we are. Representation is a good start, but crucial to this work is action. Our increasing numbers of Indigenous administrators, teachers and staff provides us with voice and leadership across the division. Leadership in this paradigm is one of humility, relationship, service, listening and walking together to do good work. Indigenous ways of teaching and learning continue to become infused into our schools and are recognized as good for all learners. The challenge in shifting our paradigm continues from both within and beyond our Seven Oaks community. We recognize the need to listen and learn alongside all Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to strengthen our commitment in fostering Indigenous excellence. Our hope for the future of education is steadfast. ■

Sherri Denysuik, Anishinaabekwe Sagkeeng First Nation, is the Assistant Superintendent of Indigenous Excellence in Education for the Seven Oaks School Division.



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Learning On the Land:

Evaluating the Efficacy of Land-Based Programming



Students learn commercial ice fishing from local community members on Lake Manitoba. Photos courtesy of Donald Nikkel.

By Donald Nikkel, Lakeshore School Division

A knife weaves along the seam that divides skin and sinew, a firm grip pulling back the hide. This right here on the back of the leg can be braided and used for bow strings. But mostly there is silence as the students watch the knowledge keeper skin the deer.

Students huddling under a tarp, watching rain drizzle onto the flat lake. Time moving as the canoes wait.

Walking and walking through the forest. Stopping to wonder about the mushroom, pulling itself from the earth. – Carl Froese.

Over the last two years in Manitoba, there has been a rapid expansion of land-based learning as Divisions strive to

implement the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the pillars of “Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With” Framework for learning. Yet, there are

lingering and emerging questions of what it means to actively implement Indigenous ways of knowing within a school system that has western/European epistemologies integrated into its structural DNA. Over the years, system leaders have focused on implementing data driven decision-making, practice supported by research, and measurable outputs to develop continuous improvement plans that are “SMART” (Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic and Time-bound). These strategies have led to substantive changes in the field of education and how data can be linked to improvements in practice but what does it now mean to bring in other ways of knowing? Should the other ways of knowing operate *within* the construct

More recently, we have been working on developing a land-based playbook which links curricular connections to expectations for integrating Indigenous ways of knowing at each grade level.

and constraints of a western/European model? More specifically, should we be looking at how to quantify and measure Indigenous ways of knowing and land-based learning? Or should we consider Indigenous ways of knowing as a *parallel* project to the western/European model? Or most radically, should our current system be overhauled to fit *within* a pedagogy of Indigenous ways of knowing?

In Lakeshore School Division, we have been working on several land-based projects that have evolved over time based on staffing, available expertise, student interest and funding. Some of our work has included canoe tripping programming with an eight-day backcountry trip and various iterations of embedding elders/knowledge keepers within the regular school day. More recently, we have been working on developing a land-based playbook which links curricular connections to expectations for integrating Indigenous ways of knowing at each grade level. While the value of these programs has been clear for those involved, there remains the fact that there are many positive things that we can do with students, but with limited resources we need to ask the question as to which programs provide the best value in working towards our end goals.

Our primary means of gathering evidence of efficacy in these land-based programs has been qualitative in nature and has included entrance and exit slips, artifacts, photovoice, and sharing circles. This data has been useful in gauging

general progress and ensuring that the activities have meaning to students but do not provide easy metrics that mesh well with our overall system of data collection which often relies upon numerical representations of learning progress. How do you quantify the value of a student who was too shy to speak at the beginning of a canoe trip singing out loud in Ojibway as we round the last bend on the eighth day? How do you evaluate connection to the land?

When we have attempted to move to more quantitative analysis, we have found that land-based education is resistant to attempts to fit it within a western/European model of SMART goals. Rather than being *specific*, the learning is often general and more related to values/character than small, targeted skills/aptitudes. Instead of being *measurable* at an individual level, the learning is often collective, and success is a group experience. While *agreed* implies consensus on the goals, land-based learning is dynamic and Elders/knowledge keepers will often wait and let the land and situation dictate the learning for the day. There is also a tendency for the goals of land-based learning not to be *realistic* in the sense that they are not *time* bound and expand to an ongoing connection between the earth, nature, community, and oneself.

In addition to the tendency of land-based education to resist quantification,



A student observes rock painting on Teggau Lake during an eight-day canoe trip.

Goodhart's law, that when any metric becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure, should serve as a warning against the wanting to delve further into breaking down and quantifying land-based education. While it might be possible to create numerical representations of learning in a land-based setting, whatever metric is agreed upon as a goal would quickly be corrupted and distorted as a data point by the fact that it a focus and will be gamified.

Given the problematic nature of attempting to place land-based learning within western/European ways of knowing, it is perhaps better to consider evaluating land-based program success through the lens of Indigenous ways of knowing as a parallel system. Rather than attempting to find quantitative ways of evaluating the efficacy of various land-based activities could we instead allow it to exist as a separate entity within our current system where rather than using metrics to determine value we instead use other means? Perhaps we need to allow space within our system to allow for trusting other ways of knowing in a substantive way. Is it enough to simply facilitate

a combination of factors, in this case, elders/knowledge keepers and a setting that allows connection with the earth and then allow for the land to teach in the way that it has for millennium? While this may sound appealing, a commitment to a parallel system means that western/European constructs such as fiscal accountability/value may have to be set aside and a formal separation created that 'protects' land-based education from having to justify its existence with the other framework.

Lastly, if we are to take reconciliation seriously, the question must be asked as to whether the ways of knowing that come through land-based education should or could form the basis for a revision of our entire school system. What would it look like if we were to invert the lens of colonialism? Instead of attempting to apply western/European ways of evaluating success to land-based programming what would happen if we were to instead use Indigenous ways of valuing outcomes to

determine success in our entire school system? Instead of numerical marks, stories? Rather than pre-determined curricula and lesson plans, ceremony, and seasons? How could we leverage the best of various world views into the work we do? ■

Donald Nikkel is the Superintendent of HR, Policy, and Public Relations, Alternative Programming, for Lakeshore School Division.



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Grade 3-4 students from Landmark Elementary School engaged in a See, Think, Wonder thinking routine as they explore the Canadian Geographic's Indigenous Peoples' Atlas of Canada Giant Floor Map. Photo courtesy of Brett Schmall.

Cultivating Ways of Knowing and Doing in Hanover School Division

By Brett Schmall and Leanne M. Peters, Hanover School Division

The transfer of knowledge from teacher to student features prominently in school systems. Over decades, this has evolved from teachers simply transmitting knowledge with students retaining and regurgitating it to inquiry learning where learners and teachers come together to ask meaningful questions and to seek authentic answers. Hanover School Division (HSD) continues to work alongside Elders and Knowledge Keepers to

cultivate authentic ways of knowing and doing, and to embrace other worldviews and perspectives.

Values, identities, traditions, and contemporary lifestyles

McGregor notes that knowledge has largely been shaped by men of European ancestry who “participate in intellectual traditions largely based on liberalism and rationalism.”¹ It can be said that school curricula continue to be largely based on the idea of knowledge that has

emerged from this white, Eurocentric, colonial tradition. Battiste by contrast points out that “It is vital to protect Indigenous knowledge, not only for the sake of Indigenous peoples in their own environments, but also to raise general awareness of the vitality of Indigenous knowledge and its dynamic capacity to help solve contemporary problems.”² The work that continues to happen in schools in HSD aims to intentionally align with the four strategies of the “Mamāhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With” Framework: authentic involvement, putting students at the centre, understanding of world views,

Hanover School Division (HSD) continues to work alongside Elders and Knowledge Keepers to cultivate authentic ways of knowing and doing, and to embrace other worldviews and perspectives.

values, identities, traditions, and contemporary lifestyles, and inclusive and culturally safe learning environment.³

Schools continue to recognize the importance of the role they play in hosting Elders and Knowledge Keepers in a good way. “What does an Elder or Knowledge Keeper see when they come into our school, and how does this make them feel?” This question has developed into schools seeing staff and students meeting guests at the office when they arrive, including a care package during

the Elder/Knowledge Keeper’s visit (snack and water), and being sure that they receive payment the day of their visit. One school community has connected with the extended family of a student in their school, allowing for the creation of a learning partnership between the great-grandmother and the school. This connection is special because even after the student left that school community, the relationship between the building’s administration and the great-grandmother has remained intact, allowing for the continuation of the learning partnership.

Putting students at the centre

Teachers are connecting the idea of putting students at the centre, to the inquiry work that they have been doing. Listening and making room for student questions and interest is an area of growth as teachers continue to think about and consider what a holistic approach looks like for all of their learners. New learning can be tricky at times, and shifting practice is a continual work in progress, but when the data is being lived out in the form of changed lives, we can’t help but sit up and take notice. The identity piece that is foundational to the “Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With” Framework is inviting one HSD school to listen deeply to the needs of a student in their learning community. This has resulted in the school looking to

partner with the student to create the cultural curricular learning that the student is craving. Adults who have worked with the youth share stories of a very different person when invited into the cultural curriculum, with one even citing that the youth decried, “Finally... I’m finding out who I am.” Listening to the learner to guide the learning may be uncomfortable for the adults but is nothing short of life giving for the child.

Authentic involvement

The invitation to explore Indigenous perspectives in curricular learning means students are asking questions about identity and relationship. Opportunities to explore Indigenous languages (Anishinaabemowin specifically) has had a noticeable impact for students in a couple of schools. Learners display a keen interest in the lessons and are excitedly taking part. Students have come up after classroom visits, sharing how meaningful the language lessons have been, eagerly asking for the next lesson. Recognizing that Treaty is more than a signed document, but rather a promise between two groups, has brought a renewed understanding. Learning Coach, Brett Schmall, explains it this way, “I’ve heard it talked about like a marriage. There is a certificate that is signed, sure, but that’s not the thing. The celebration, the people coming together, that is the thing. I mean, the certificate is there too, but that really isn’t what a marriage is all about. It’s like that with Treaty too.”

Understanding of world views

Perspective is also an area of exploration in HSD schools. According to Anuik, Battiste and George, “Aboriginal Elders, cultural resource people, and Indigenous scholars believe that to identify, comprehend, and nourish the learning spirit requires educators to recognize that all learners are ‘spirit, heart, mind, and body.’”⁴ Recognizing another person’s worldview, while still holding your own, is an integral part

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of building community, and something that HSD has been focused on since it adopted 21st Century skills learning through its Deeper Learning focus seven years ago. Turning to curiosity about the unknown instead of being fearful, invites the potential for bridges to be built and partnerships to be established in ways that haven't been before. Working with neighbouring communities like Roseau River Anishinaabe First Nation has made for moments where diversity is celebrated, but not only that; connections have been made as well, as people have paused to see similarities.

Sometimes policy is viewed as a disembodied directive, devoid of the heart and spirit of the people it is intended to serve. Not so with "Mamāhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With." It has provided Hanover teachers with an invitation to consider well the work that they do daily with Indigenous learners (and others) in their classrooms, supporting them as a document like this

can, in their bid to connect people to each other and themselves, to work toward the 'good life.' ■

Leanne M. Peters, Ed. D., is an Assistant Superintendent in Hanover

School Division. She can be reached at lepeters@hsd.ca. Brett Schmall, M.Ed. is a Red River Métis, and an Indigenous Learning and Assessment Coach in Hanover School Division. He can be reached at bschmall@hsd.ca.

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Winnipeg School Division: Emerging Leadership and Cultural Knowledge

By the Winnipeg School Division Indigenous Education Team

Students, staff, and communities are seeing the impacts of implementing Winnipeg School Division's Indigenous Education Policy and the Manitoba Indigenous Inclusive Education Policy Framework, "Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With." The Professional Network of Indigenous Educators (PNIE) and the work of the Indigenous Ways of Life Teachers highlight two initiatives forming strength-based practices in schools that privilege Indigenous knowledge, identity building, and belonging. The PNIE is a grassroots initiative for self-identified Indigenous educators to share strengths, skills, and work as a collaborative support network for one another. Students are also benefitting from having more and more opportunities for learning about Indigenous Peoples from Indigenous People through the support of the Winnipeg School Division's Indigenous Education team and the WSD Indigenous Circle of Grandparents.

We know it is important for students to see Indigenous role models and to have Indigenous teachers, vice-principals, and principals. The PNIE is a step forward in ensuring Indigenous staff have access to leadership development and support in their own learning journey. Many of the network members share they are the "go to" or the only Indigenous self-declared staff member which carries a heavy responsibility. The PNIE increases access to cultural knowledge and learning through the exact system that historically robbed Indigenous Peoples of this knowledge. Winnipeg School Division acknowledges the important work of Indigenous educators and how it is imperative to feel supported, valued, and empowered.



The PNIE is an important group working as positive role models for youth both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Together, through sharing strengths, networking, and gathering for learning opportunities, the PNIE builds relationship and community in a culturally safe space for Indigenous staff to learn and grow together.

The impact of the PNIE can be seen through the increased confidence in members bringing their collective knowledge back to their students and school staff. The PNIE also works as a place where Indigenous educators feel like they can be themselves and reach out when in need. The PNIE is driven by its members adapting to the learning needs of the group. The content of the professional development program is not determined by anyone other than its members and is not the typical prescribed professional learning community. Gatherings include everything from sharing professional

resources and lesson plans, time on the land, cultural teachings, pedagogy, and content knowledge, planning for curricular learning, observing each other's classrooms, and most importantly building relationship and community with one another.

"I have participated in PNIE and felt the ability to have a network like that available to us is truly the best way to show decolonization within our system. There were so many strong representatives of different nations coming together to break bread, share teachings and share strengths and talents. Coming to those meetings feels like coming home." – PNIE member.

Since the inception of the PNIE, we have seen 12 members move into leadership positions within the division and that number continues to grow annually. Through sharing collective knowledge and skillsets, the community becomes stronger together.

Indigenous Way of Life Teachers, Matt Mousseau, Ocean Bruyere,

and Teresa Byrne are some of the newest members of the Indigenous Education Team working to bring cultural knowledge to schools alongside Division Kookum Marsha Missyabit and Grandmother Dr. Myra Laramee. The team works alongside educators to bring teachings to schools and help build capacity in staff to open access to cultural revitalization in appropriate ways. Often, educators feel hesitant to incorporate culture into curriculum. The thinking is to move curriculum into culture. The Indigenous Ways of Life Teachers come to walk alongside and share teachings such as feasting, smudging, pow wow, the drum, and ceremony. Matt and Ocean share men's and women's perspectives in their cultural teachings, while Teresa includes the Metis cultural knowledge perspective. The team acknowledges diversity amongst Indigenous people and helps build relationships with ally's working towards reconciliation through education.

"Teresa has complimented many plans and lessons with her great knowledge of Metis history. She has provided not only vast knowledge but many resources and connections to make the lessons come to life!" – Indigenous Learning Support Teacher.

A perfect complement and not new to the team is Divisional Kookum Marsha Missyabit. Marsha has the honour of being "Kookum" (grandmother) to approximately 33,000 students from WSD. Marsha brings her personal and professional experience to share stories of healing and support for all staff and students to build understanding of Indigenous Peoples.

"Don't push people away that are struggling, pull them closer: help them heal and grow." – Divisional Kookum Marsha Missyabit.

As part of the senior administration team, Marsha is an asset in planning for Indigenous student success and supporting schools with implementing the WSD Indigenous Education Policy and supporting the work of "Mamāhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With."

Cultural knowledge is only one part of the Indigenous Education



Plan for Winnipeg School Division, but an important one. "We can see the difference in the student's faces when we walk in the halls, they are excited to see us again, and we see Indigenous kids start to raise their hands, come to the front, and share their knowledge as well" says Matt Mousseau Indigenous Ways of Life Teacher. Schools also access support in making curricular connections to curriculum, joining in multiple professional development opportunities, and working together to plan using the actions and strategies from "Mamāhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With:" authentic involvement, students at the centre, understanding worldviews, values, identities, traditions and contemporary lifestyles, and inclusive and culturally safe learning environments. Building relationships through empathy and understanding, learning about Indigenous Peoples from Indigenous peoples

are integral to shifting mindsets and privileging Indigenous knowledge in education. WSD's goal is to have all students feel a sense of belonging in schools, have meaning in their education, feel purpose in their schooling, and have hope for their future, the central tenants of the Indigenous Inclusive Education Policy. ■

The Winnipeg School Division's Indigenous Education Team is comprised of Indigenous Graduation Coaches, Indigenous Learning Support Teachers, Build from Within Program Staff, Medical Careers Exploration Program Staff, Indigenous Ways of Life Teachers, Indigenous Leadership Mentor Coach, Community Support Worker Coordinator, working in collaboration with the Service Director of Indigenous Education, Assistant Superintendent of Indigenous Education, and Division Kookum and Grandmother.

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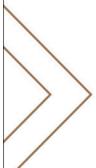
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