WEETUTOSKEMITOWIN
WORKING TOGETHER FOR
SUSTAINABLE SCHOOLS
SITUATING SELF
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
The release of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada in 2015 (TRC, 2015a) has resulted in significant deliberation around reconciling the injustices of the past and present.

- What does reconciliation mean?
- Whose responsibility is it to reconcile?
- How do we move towards a new understanding of the relationship between Canada and the original inhabitants of this land?
THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS

"EDUCATION is what got us here, and EDUCATION is what will get us out."

Justice Murray Sinclair
HOW THEN WILL THESE CALLS TO ACTION BE EMBODIED IN CANADIAN SCHOOLS?

• Important roles in fostering educational change (Fullan, 2014) and shaping school culture (Deal & Peterson, 2016)

• Realization of the Calls to Action around education is much more likely to flourish if they supported by strong school leadership
“WHOSE RECONCILIATION?”

- Under-representation of Indigenous peoples in Canadian teaching profession
- Extrapolating to school leaders, numbers are even smaller
- Necessitates that non-Indigenous principals engage with the Calls to Action if they are ever to be realized in schools and classrooms.
CHALLENGES

• As Tuck and Yang (2012) note, “There is a long and bumbled history of non-Indigenous peoples making moves to alleviate the impacts of colonization” (p. 3).

• Outline several ‘moves to innocence’ by non-Indigenous peoples that attempt to “relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all” (p. 10).

• “a framework of excuses, distractions, and diversions”
CHALLENGES

IRRESOLUTE PUBLIC OPINION
CHALLENGES
COLONIAL EDUCATION STRUCTURES

• Tribal Critical Race Theory: “colonization is endemic to society” (Brayboy, 2005, p.429).

• It is likely that most principals have been “structurally denied the opportunity to learn about Aboriginal people” (Pete, Schneider & O’Reilly, 2013, p. 105). Non-indigenous leaders must first engage then in a reflective process of learning and unlearning as they work through their own biases and racism.

• Few, if any system-level supports or PL opportunities exist to aid principals in this journey.
• FACT: Indigenous populations are growing at a rate more than 4X that of the national average.

• FACT: Indigenous graduation rate is about 30% lower than overall graduation rates in SK

• FACT: Youth Suicide rate is over 4x higher in Indigenous populations in SK (SK Children’s Advocate, 2017).
How then might non-Indigenous school principals go about engaging with Calls to Action in ethical and authentic ways?
RELATIONSHIP TO FLOURISHING

• “a sense of purpose for ongoing school improvement of educational experiences for students by creating a school community of care, connectedness and trust where teachers feel engaged to share in the work of leading together for school improvement (Cherkowski & Walker, 2016, p.386)
PILOT STUDY

- Five school administrators from Saskatchewan
  - 3 Principals; 2 VPs
  - 3 Urban schools; 2 rural schools
  - Interviews with all five
  - Observations at two schools (two visits per school)
FRAMEWORK
INDIGENIST AGENDA (BATTISTE, 2005)

Teaching Each Other
(Goulet & Goulet, 2014)

Indigenous Determinism & Settler Accountability

Indigenous principal of Relationality
(Kovach, 2014)

Ethical Space of Engagement
(Ermine, 2007)

Schools where Indigenous students flourish
RELATIONALITY

• relationality positions strategic advocacy as being predicated on the re-positioning of power and authority. In other words, it is Indigenous peoples that must lead reconciliation work in schools, with the principal as a supporting actor. It is only then that principals can respectfully engage the ethics of allyship in the communities that they seek to serve.
TEACHING EACH OTHER

- **Weechihitowin**
  - “we-chee-hit-oh-win”
  - being helpful and supportive in relationships

- **Weetutoskemitowin**
  - “we-two-tusk-eh-mitt-oh-win”
  - shared collaborative work or working together

- **Iseechigechna**
  - “iss-ee-jig-ä-ëna”
  - commitment to the work

- **Weechiseechigemtitowin**
  - “we-jiss-ee-jig-eh-mitt-oh-win”
  - strategic alliances
if the reproduction of colonial forces in schools are to be resisted, the relationships between the school, the administrators, and the community need to be revolutionized.

these newly re-imagined relationships become the ethical space of engagement for moving beyond the status quo:

• I just see issues differently; when students won't go to class I don't scream at them and drag them there, that's just not what we do. We listen, and if they don't go to class for the next week, well it's because there's a process that's going on and I'm not going to be that guy who is screaming and yelling at a community who's had nothing but trauma, I won't be that person (Todd)
• Principals were working with community members, Elders, Indigenous consultants, peer groups

• *Weetutuskemitowin*, however, is not a simple process of engaging people in the traditional senses of school operations. The act of working together is much more dynamic and interpersonal. Alecia explains:
  
  • Something as simple as sitting with someone for lunch and talking about your family or taking the time to send a text message or check on how somebody is doing, that doesn’t have anything to do with work, then your friends you’re not just colleagues. I’m not just asking you to do something for my students or my school, but you are a friend of mine and I’m going to have a relationship with you.
• Some administrators boldly demonstrated *iseechigehina*, cognizant of further factors and implications, but willing to take such risks.

• Others choose instead to persuade and empower students to mobilize the efforts and take up Indigenist agendas themselves.

• Complicating influences from organizational and ministerial levels, however, sometimes stymied their effort:

  • [I’m] completely bound by colonial structure. That is probably the biggest challenge that I would see—is that if people have to choose between doing their job as prescribed by school division, or doing their job as prescribed in their hearts. And I believe most people in this building have their hearts in the right place, but you know, of course that capitalistic-keeping your job-kind of thing is going to trump that a lot of the time (Margaret)
• but Margaret is adamant that her responsibilities as administrator do not stop with what comes across her desk from central admin:
  
  • School administrators need to use their positions of privilege and power to move the reconciliation process forward in schools. We have major influence over these next generation and so it's up to us to keep that moving forward and everything in schools have to be true inclusionary practices without those racially oppressive undertones and until we see those we, colonialism will keep repeating itself.
• *Weechiseechigemitowin* requires school leaders to utilize existing relationships and networks to identity potential allies as part of their commitment to reconciliation education. These allies can include colleagues, parents, students, and the broader school community.
  
  • Margaret encouraged students to be the agents of change and further the persuasive movement.
  
  • Todd was more inclined to ‘stick his neck out’, mediating organizational structures with personal commitment where lack of hierarchical support exists.
CONCLUSIONS

• The principals in our study are (re)defining a new settler role where relational and ethical accountability are prioritized over (or at least embedded alongside) traditional hierarchies of power and authority.

• Non-Indigenous principals cannot and should not ‘lead’ reconciliation. Rather, principals must embrace Indigenous leadership of truth and reconciliation—as supporter, advocate, and genuine ally. This is essential in the creation of flourishing schools for Indigenous students and communities.