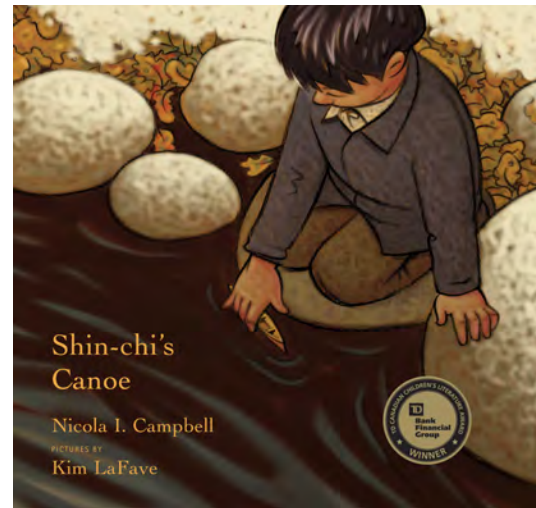
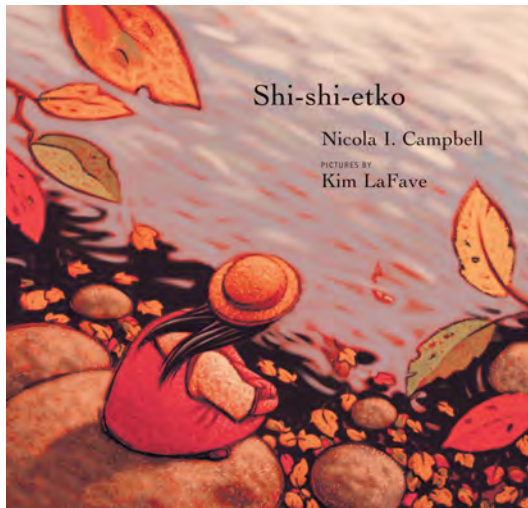


Becoming Comfortable with the Uncomfortable: Introducing the Topic of Residential Schools in Kindergarten



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Rationale & Background

“... in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to make age-appropriate curriculum on residential school, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.”

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Action 62.1

In light of the Truth and Reconciliation Report, and the Government of Alberta’s determination that the history of Residential Schools be addressed every year from K to 12, the Early Years Group was inspired to consider how the topic might be addressed in our own classes. Shifting the question from “when” to “how” highlighted the importance of taking both a developmental approach and responding sensitively to the individuals in our class.

The call for mandatory education requirements about Aboriginal history and contemporary contributions - including the history of residential school - at the Kindergarten level, inspired us to search provincial curriculum documents as a starting point to our planning. We were surprised that, even in the Alberta curriculum, we were unable to find specific curriculum expectations addressing

this topic in Kindergarten. Our findings (or rather, lack thereof) were confirmed when we read that KAIROS (Canadian churches working together for justice and peace) issued a “report card” in 2015 on provincial and territorial curriculum using the TRC’s Call to Action 62.1 and concluded that no province or territory in Canada received top marks in this area. (Vowel, Chelsea, *Indigenous Writes*, p.177). We felt a responsibility to consider how we would teach this topic at the Lab School; helping to develop appropriate kindergarten curriculum also seems important on the national level.

Without specific kindergarten curriculum expectations to consider, we turned to picture books that focus on residential school experience. We choose to use two picture books as the basis of our lesson. In *Shi-shi-etko*, the protagonist is a young girl preparing to leave for residential school. We realized that the children hearing the story, having little or no knowledge of residential school, may not “read into” the story the way we would. We decided to follow this story with *Shin-chi’s Canoe*, a story that describes some of the experience of residential school. Our lesson was designed to give the children the opportunity to revisit the first story. It is this re-read of *Shi-shi-etko* that will take place in the Lesson Study lesson. We wanted the children to be able to approach the story with more information and to have the chance to reflect more deeply on Shi-shi-etko’s experience.

Our goal in this lesson, is not to offer the children a comprehensive look at the difficult topic of residential school, but rather to provide a “window” into the topic. We know that it will take many conversations, over many years of the children’s development, for a deeper understanding to develop. We hope that by beginning to be familiar with this information, it will allow the children to develop that depth over time. A second, but equally important, goal of our lesson was, for us, as educators, to become comfortable with this uncomfortable topic. We want to become more practiced in ways to approach it and talk about it with young children. We suspect that one day we will not think twice about addressing this topic with children, even very young ones. Our lesson is one step towards that vision.

Pre-Lessons: “Is It Real? Is It Still Real?”

Providing context

Read: *Shi-shi-etko* by Nicola Campbell, a story about a child and her family in the days leading up to her first leaving for Residential School. The school itself is not named, nor is the family’s feelings about the school or Shi-shi-etko leaving touched upon.

Shi-shi-etko was first read 9 days prior, on the SKs weekly visit to Sibelius Park. As the children were seated on the earth, the teacher asked a few questions.

Questions asked after the read aloud:

- How old do you think Shi-shi-etko might be?

- She is going to school for the very first time, is she going to the type of school you go to?
- How long is Shi-shi-etko going to be away for? How long do you go to school?
- How do you think Shi-shi-etko feels? Do you think she is excited, maybe a little nervous?
- What are her parents telling her she needs to do while she is gone?
 - *The children offered that Shi-shi-etko might be feeling sad about having to leave her family for so long. They knew she would be young but couldn't settle on a particular age.*

Read: *Shin-chi's Canoe* by Nicola Campbell, a story about Shi-shi-etko's brother and his experience at Residential School. This story is explicit in naming the school as an Indian Residential School and details some of the hardships suffered by the children there, while maintaining a tone of positive family connection, identity, and hopefulness.

Shin-chi's Canoe dealt with more difficult content which is one of the reasons we chose to share this story with the children in a more quiet, private setting. A transcript of the conversation before, during and after the sharing of *Shin-chi's Canoe* can be found in Appendix B.

The comments shared both during and after hearing this book were more pointed. "Hey, I'm six!" "I wouldn't like being hungry all the time." and, of course, "Is it real? Is it still real?"

Questions asked after the read aloud

How is this book different? *"Sadder."*

What do you think of the school? *"It's a bad school."*

Who do you think was sent to these schools? *"Bad kids?"*

These questions and the children's comments allowed the teacher to more fully contextualize the story and the history of residential schools, responding to issues they highlighted - lack of food, the absence of family. Many drew out Shin-chi's resourcefulness and the happy reunion at the end.

Lesson

In this lesson, the teacher will be re-reading the book *Shi-shi-etko* by Nicola Campbell.

The children will be asked to gather for a story. The teacher will acknowledge sharing *Shi-shi-etko* before, as well as following up with her brother's story in *Shin-chi's Canoe*.

The teacher will allow time for comments should they arise.

The teacher will ask the children to listen to the story once again and perhaps share their thoughts about it after.

After the reading, the teacher will gently probe for responses, as seems appropriate.

Materials:

- A copy of: Shi-shi-etko by Nicola Campbell
- A copy of: Shin-chi's Canoe by Nicola Campbell

Intended Follow-up:

Reading of the story, *When We Were Alone* by David Robertson.

Related Ministry Expectations

Kindergarten*Overall expectations:*

- Demonstrate understanding and critical awareness of a variety of written materials that are read by and with the EL–K team

Specific expectations:

- 2.6 use prior knowledge to make connections (e.g., to new experiences, to other books, to events in the world) to help them understand a diverse range of materials read by and with the EL–K team
- 2.7 use illustrations to support comprehension of texts that are read by and with the EL–K team

Grade 1*Overall expectations:*

- Read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of literary, graphic, and informational texts, using a range of strategies to construct meaning

Specific expectations:

Making Inferences/Interpreting Texts - 1.5 use stated and implied information and ideas in texts, initially with support and direction, to make simple inferences and reasonable predictions about them

**First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Connections,
Resource Guide, The Kindergarten Program**

The expectations listed here implicitly or explicitly offer opportunities for students to learn about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit connections that include recognizing people in the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities as well as places, buildings, and structures relevant to these communities. These expectations also offer opportunities for making cultural comparisons of traditions, foods, languages, and the arts. Beyond these particular expectations, the kindergarten classroom provides many other occasions, such as various reading and/or storytelling and community activities, for students to explore and learn about the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities.

Guide for Observers

1. As the students are listening to the story, observe their reactions. Pay attention to their body language and make note of any comments/questions shared.
2. Observe children who are not verbally responding. What is their body language? How are they reacting to the story?
3. As you are hearing the story read aloud, make note of your own reaction to the story.
4. Consider positioning yourself so that you can observe the reactions of a few students. We request that you sit on the floor if possible, just slightly out of sight of the children.

Appendix A: List of Indigenous Books Appropriate for Kindergarten

- *Shi-shi-etko* by Nicola Campbell
- *Shin-chi's Canoe* by Nicola Campbell
- *When We Were Alone* by David Robertson
- *Arctic Stories* by Michael Kusugak
- *Kookum's Red Shoes* by Peter Eyvindson
- *Carry Me, Mama* by Monica Devine
- *On Mother's Lap* by Ann Herbert Scott
- *Mama, Do You Love Me?* by Barbara M. Joose
- *Taking Care of Mother Earth* by Leanne Flett Kruger
- *Thanks to the Animals* by Allen Sockabasin
- *You're Just Right* by Victor Lethbridge
- *Sweetest Kulu* by Celina Kalluk
- *Fishing with Grandma* by Susan Avingaq
- *Dipnetting with Dad* by Willie Sellars

Appendix B: Shin-Chi's Canoe - Transcribed Discussion

Lesson study - Friday, February 3. – CAROL READS

Carol: Remember we read a story, (shows)

Kids: Shi-shi-etko

Carol: I have another one, it comes after and it is about her brother.

Do you remember what was happening?

Kids: She went to school for the whole season.

Carol: Three whole seasons and how did she feel

Kids: Sad

Nervous

Scared

Carol: Did you guys feel a bit nervous and scared the first time you went to school?

Kids: No! (lots said this)

Actually I was a bit happy!

I was scared, I did not want to enter the gate to the school.

Carol: It can be hard doing new things when you don't know what's coming

Kid: I have bad memories of that.

Carol: (Reading)

'on her way back to Indian Residential School...they were all going'

About canoeing with their parents:

'we love it but we want to do it alone!' said the six year old.

Kids: I'm six!

Like me!

Carol: (reading) *Last year, she was punished because she didn't understand the English words, cut away her braids.*

If we could we would keep you here at home, said her mother. It's the law that forces us to send you away.

We will be waiting for you to come home.

The children sat in the dinner hall on opposite sides of room. – made up sign language say hi I miss you

Breakfast was porridge and burnt toast, teachers were eating eggs, bacon potatoes,

Lunch was thin soup

Dinner was hard buns and stew,

Teachers had meat, vegetables and corn

The children never had enough to eat.

Kids: I do not want to go to that school!

Carol: It doesn't sound like a nice place to be.
*He made a friend, John, little mischief x 2, stole food, found apples in the orchard,
Discovered a jar of cherries!! But when they opened it, it was black olives.*
Laughs

Carol: What did you think of that story?

Kids: It was sadder

It was sort of medium, because, like, they got a canoe too, and like, yeah.

The ending was nice when they come home.

What happened to the small canoe?

It floated away.

Maybe the dad picked it out of the water and made it into a bigger canoe.

Carol: Does this sound like a school that you have heard of before?

Student: yes.

Carol waits for more, but he doesn't have any more to say.

Kid: Is it real?

Carol: Very often we have that question. This is a kind of school that was real and around for many years, and thousands of children had to go to these schools.

Kid: Is it still real?

Carol: No, it is not still real in Canada.

Does anyone remember what the school was called?

Kid: It was happy and sad because he made a friend and stole more food.

Carol: In the book they call it the Indian or First Nations residential school. They were around for over a hundred years.

Do you think all children went?

Kid: No!

Carol: Who had to go?

Kid: The kids that were bad.

Carol: But were those kids bad? Was shi shi etko bad?

Kid: They just get forced.

Kid: What does forced mean?

Carol: It means they had to go even though they didn't want to go and the parents didn't want them to go.

Do you remember mom said we wouldn't like to send you but we have to?
If you were an Indian or First Nations person for many years, you were taken from your family and taken to the schools.

What wouldn't you like at those schools.

Kid: The food.

Carol: Can you imagine not getting enough to eat?

Kid: I can sleep with my sister because we are both girls..

Carol: Maybe you could sneak into their bed.

Kid: Imagine starving for one whole month.

Kid: It would be even longer than that

Kid: Three months.

Kid: Imagine if you went to school for two years long.

Carol – we will talk about this more, as we go forward.

We will go back to shi shi etko and read it again.

Observer Debrief After Shin-Chi's Canoe:

Ask observers to stay really far back.

Saw some kids doing different behaviours:

- Two were looking around and getting restless...
- That's normal for them, as they don't connect as much to story.
- Kids who were cuddling usually cuddle during stories.

Norah – what I am aware of is that it's like we are really not doing a topic that you learn all at once. Here's the words 'indian residential school', and you learn about not eating, and the next year you are not starting from nothing. Our goal is not for the kids to have a political stance etc. , rather that they have a window in. Even the idea of who would have gone to these schools? Indian /first nations person vocabulary.

Carol will read another first nations creation story before the lesson study.

Richard: Part of our title should be the quote 'Is this real? Is it still real?'. I think that's really powerful.

Before you read the story next time what happens on the day of ..

I would explain while I'm reading I want you to think about your own feelings.

Not specific, rather what do you remember?

I love how gentle the question was, we got to notice what the kids notice.

Student – would have just told us if he knew more, but he knows a little tiny bit.

Also touching that the question ‘did only bad children go there?’... that’s the justice piece... That’s what the Canadian government thought. And the colonial part of it.

Appendix C: Other Resources

- *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Connections: Scope and Sequence of Expectations Ontario Curriculum Resource Guide*
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/elementaryFNMI.pdf>
- *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis & Inuit Issues in Canada* by Chelsea Vowel
- <http://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/vancouver-daycare-teaches-residential-schools-1.3243358>
- *Authentic First Peoples Resources K-9* <http://www.fnesc.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/PUBLICATION-61460-FNESC-Authentic-Resources-Guide-2016-08-26.pdf>
- *Indian Residential Schools and Reconciliation Resources* (Gr.5, 10, 11)
<http://www.fnesc.ca/irsr/>
- *Aboriginal Education Strategy* (Gr.1-8)
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/elemExpectations.html>
- *Walking Together First Nations, Metis and Inuit Perspectives in Curriculum. Healing Historical Trauma*
http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/aswt/#/healing_historical_trauma/beginning_together
- *The Learning Circle: Classroom Activities on First Nations in Canada, ages 4-7* <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1316530132377/1316530184659>
- *Inuuqatigiit: The Curriculum from the Inuit Perspective K-12*
https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/www.ece.gov.nt.ca/files/resources/inuuqatigiit_k-12_curriculum.pdf
- *In Our Own Words: Bringing Authentic First Peoples Content to the K-3 Classroom* <http://www.fnesc.ca/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/PUB-LFP-K-3-In-our-Own-Words-for-Web.pdf>
- *OISE: Deepening Knowledge Resources for and about Aboriginal Education: Residential Schools*
http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/deepeningknowledge/Teacher_Resources/Curriculum_Resources_by_subjects/Social_Sciences_and_Humanities/Education/Residential_Schools/index.html