

AECEO's Active Commitment to Truth and Reconciliation

In this issue of eceLINK we are proud to share a powerful Peer Reviewed Collection of articles that focus on Indigenous Knowledges and Pedagogies in Early Childhood Education. This special issue is symbolic of the AECEO's first steps toward reconciliation with Indigenous people in Canada. We will continue to move forward: Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators together, through AECEO's newly established Guiding Committee on Truth and Reconciliation.

Ontario is covered by 46 treaties and other agreements, such as land purchases by the Crown signed between 1781 and 1930. Treaties are the legally binding agreements that set out the rights, responsibilities and relationships of First Nations and the federal and provincial governments.

By acknowledging the territory and the treaties that govern it we hope to show our recognitions and respect for Indigenous peoples. We recognize the presence of Indigenous peoples and communities both in the past and the present and we understand that recognition and respect are essential elements of establishing healthy, reciprocal relations. These relationships are the key to reconciliation, a process to which the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario is committed.¹

As early childhood educators working with young children in communities across the country we have a responsibility to learn and share with our children the truth about Canada's darkest history: the residential school system. Through our pedagogical knowledge and practice we can open opportunities for all children to have conversations about healing and building new relationships that will strengthen future generations and allow all of Canada's children to thrive.

As the Honourable Murray Sinclair has said, "it was the educational system that has contributed to this problem in this country and it is the educational system, we believe, that is going to help us get away from this."²

1 Thank you to the Ontario Federation of Labour Aboriginal Circle (OFL, 2017) for sharing their resource for acknowledging traditional territory in Ontario. Retrieved from: <http://ofl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017-12-04-Traditional-Territory-Acknowledgements.pdf>

2 Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2011 <https://vimeo.com/25389165>

For over 150 years, residential schools operated in Canada. Over 150,000 children - seven generations - attended these schools. Many never returned³. The residential schools were created for the purpose of "separating Aboriginal children from their families, in order to minimize and weaken family ties and cultural linkages, and to indoctrinate children into a new culture of Euro-Christian Canadian society"⁴. The last residential school was closed 1996.

In 1991, four Indigenous and three non-Indigenous commissioners were appointed to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) and tasked with investigating the complex issues facing First Nations, Inuit and Métis people and communities across Canada. The commissioners held public hearings, visited communities and consulted experts across Canada. Throughout the lengthy consultation process many Indigenous people spoke to the commissioners about their residential school experiences⁵.

The central conclusion of the Commission's final report (1996) was that, "the main policy direction, pursued for more than 150 years, first by colonial then by Canadian governments, has been wrong"⁶. The Commissioners made hundreds of recommendations to repair Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples and communities. A key recommendation was for a separate public inquiry into the history of the residential school system.

Nearly twenty years later, on June 11, 2008 then Prime Minister Stephen Harper made an apology on behalf of the Canadian government to the approximately 80,000 living former students, and all family members and communities affected by the residential school system. Following in 2009, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada was finally able to begin a multi-year process, to listen to Survivors, communities and others affected by the residential school system. The final

3 National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. Retrieved from: <https://nctr.ca/about-new.php>

4 Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report, 2015. Retrieved from: <http://nctr.ca/reports.php>

5 CBC News, 2008. Retrieved from: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/a-history-of-residential-schools-in-canada-1.702280>

6 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996). Retrieved from: <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100014597/1100100014637>

report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was released to the public in 2015 and includes multiple reports and 94 Calls to Action.

It is the responsibility of all people in Canada to rise to reconciliation by implementing all 94 of the recommendations. As early childhood educators we know that our early years and child care programs support children's natural curiosity about their world. Education is the second priority area of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. The Commission calls on Canada to provide culturally based education for First Nations children, and to educate all Canadians about Indigenous peoples to prepare them for the important work of reconciliation. Within the TRC Calls to Action on education is the specific call for "federal, provincial, territorial, and Indigenous governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families."⁷

During a meeting in 2017 the AECEO Board of Directors passed a unanimous decision to make an active commitment to participate in and support the process of reconciliation with First Nation, Métis and Inuit people and communities in Ontario and across the country.

We knew this meant the AECEO would need to work internally on its own policies, practices and procedures and externally to share Indigenous ways of knowing and learning with our members and all ECEs and early years staff in Ontario. During the meeting it was acknowledged by the Board that there were no Indigenous voices at the Board level and we asked the question: what opportunities does the AECEO provide to Indigenous communities to have their voices heard? The AECEO's mission is to build and support a strong collective voice for early childhood educators and so it is our responsibility to provide culturally safe opportunities for First Nation, Métis and Inuit educators to have their own voice within the AECEO.

After initial conversations with members of the Indigenous community we felt that establishing a Guiding Committee on Truth and Reconciliation could support the AECEO in this important process. We are still in the initial stages of structuring the Guiding Committee and developing a work plan but we hope to establish a formal statement and action plan for how the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario can contribute positively towards reconciliation with all First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples.

The Guiding Committee has had two online meetings and is focused on recruiting participants with the goal of establishing a committee that is lead by Indigenous educators. We are reaching out through our membership, networks and partners to encourage Indigenous ECEs, leaders, Elders and non-Indigenous allies to join the AECEO's Guiding Committee.

AECEO is committed to a process of shedding our colonial processes that have failed, in the past, to provide equitable

opportunities for Indigenous educators to share their knowledges, traditions and teachings.

Special thanks to long-time AECEO member Sherry Lickers, RECE, AECEO.C, Supervisor of Six Nations Child Care Services, who has agreed to Chair the AECEO's Guiding Committee on Truth and Reconciliation. Thank you also, to Elder Brenda Mason from Sandy Lake, who has graciously agreed to share her knowledge and wisdom as the Guiding Committee's Elder.

Resources:

KAIROS Canada

<https://www.kairoscanada.org/>

10 children's literature books about residential schools

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/10-books-about-residential-schools-to-read-with-your-kids-1.3208021>

Video: What is Reconciliation?

<https://vimeo.com/25389165>

Video: CBC News, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Release Their Final Report

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKKLgwlosaw>

Video: Namwayut: we are all one. Truth and reconciliation in Canada

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zuRQmwaREY>

Further Reading:

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996)

<http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100014597/1100100014637>

From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools (2008)

<https://fncaringsociety.com/publications/truth-reconciliation-transforming-legacy-residential-schools-0>

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Final Report (2015)

<http://nctr.ca/reports.php>

A History of Residential Schools in Canada

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/a-history-of-residential-schools-in-canada-1.702280>

Inuit relocations throughout the arctic

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/inuit-get-federal-apology-for-forced-relocation-1.897468>

Guide to Acknowledging First Peoples & Traditional Territory (Canadian Association of University Teachers, CAUT)

<https://www.caut.ca/content/guide-acknowledging-first-peoples-traditional-territory>

⁷ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Final Report (2015). Retrieved from: <http://nctr.ca/reports.php>