



Enhancing Equity in Ontario Elementary Education Symposium

PANEL E SUMMARY: Equity for Indigenous Students

PANELISTS

Jodie Williams
Academic Coordinator,
Indigenous Education,
Dufferin-Peel Catholic
District School Board

Tesa Fiddler
Coordinator,
Indigenous Education,
Thunder Bay Catholic
District School Board

Nicole Ineese-Nash
Founder and Executive
Director, *Finding Our*
Power Together;
Assistant Professor,
Early Childhood
Studies, Toronto
Metropolitan University

In a panel about equity for Indigenous students, three speakers shared their thoughts on promising practices, challenges, and possible actions. There was agreement that beyond seeking equity, it is fundamental to understand that Indigenous peoples seek sovereignty—that is, the power to self-govern and make decisions about systems and policies that impact them. Rather than offers of help, we must consider how to step aside so that Indigenous peoples can do the work themselves—they do not need saving, which is a colonial mindset that must be deconstructed. Decolonization is not possible without all individuals fostering an understanding of colonialism, whiteness, and white supremacy.

Educators need to take the initiative to learn about the experiences of Indigenous peoples instead of depending on Indigenous peoples to teach them. While establishing an Indigenous Education Department/Lead and offering professional development and training can provide meaningful learning opportunities, these initiatives require adequate time and resources to be effective. Engagement with Indigenous youth, cultural keepers, knowledge keepers, and community partners is central to this work. Furthermore, we cannot stop at discussions about the negative experiences of genocide and discrimination but also showcase the beauty, joy, and brilliance of Indigenous peoples.

Promising practices include creating access to culture and language by Indigenous Peoples (e.g., land-based education, culture camps, language nest, family events, etc.), offering programs targeting schools/classes with Indigenous students (e.g., [Inuit games](#), [Onkwehonewe games](#), [Métis education](#), etc.), and supporting access to culture through teaching accommodations (e.g., not assigning homework if attending cultural events, etc.). However, there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution. Indigenous peoples are not a homogenous group, but diverse individuals with a range of experiences, cultures, languages, and varying levels of access to different support systems.

“At the end of the day, who’s making the decisions?... it’s always other people making decisions about other people.”

- Jodie Williams

“When I think about reconciliation, we have to be so careful that it’s not becoming rhetorical. It’s not a fluff word, and I’m hearing it because it feels good... but where is the action that goes along with it?”

- Tesa Fiddler

“Many of our young people do not survive. And so we need to create systems that not only allow them to survive, but hopefully to thrive.”

- Nicole Ineese-Nash

To continue on the path of cultural awareness, sensitivity, competency, and humility and strive towards cultural safety, we must prioritize the holistic well-being of Indigenous peoples. Robyn Williams (1999) defines cultural safety as “an environment, which is safe for people; where is no assault, challenge, or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning together with dignity, and truly listening”.

To cite this document: Patel, S., Hopson, R.L., & Saeidpour, S. (2024). *Enhancing Equity in Ontario Elementary Education Symposium: Equity for Indigenous Students - Knowledge Mobilization Summary Report*. Toronto, ON. School of Early Childhood Studies, Toronto Metropolitan University.

For more information, visit: torontomu.ca/educational-equity-symposium/



Enhancing Equity in Ontario Elementary Education Symposium

PANEL E SUMMARY: Equity for Indigenous Students

PANELISTS

Jodie Williams
Academic Coordinator,
Indigenous Education,
Dufferin-Peel Catholic
District School Board

Tesa Fiddler
Coordinator,
Indigenous Education,
Thunder Bay Catholic
District School Board

Nicole Ineese-Nash
Founder and Executive
Director, *Finding Our*
Power Together;
Assistant Professor,
Early Childhood
Studies, Toronto
Metropolitan University

RESOURCES SUGGESTED BY PANELISTS

Books about Indigenous history and literature

- *Unsettling Canada: A National Wake-Up Call* (by Arthur Manuel & Grand Chief Ronald Derrickson)
- *Five Little Indians* by Michelle Good
- *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* by Daniel Heath Justice
- *Indigenous Writes* by Chelsea Vowel
- *The Reconciliation Manifesto: Recovering the Land, Rebuilding the Economy* by Arthur Manuel & Grand Chief Ronald Derrickson
- *Whose Land is it Anyway?: A Manual for Decolonization* by Peter McFarlane & Nicole Schabus

Books about white supremacy and fragility

- *White Fragility: Why it's so Hard for White People to Talk about Racism* by Robin DiAngelo
- *Me and White Supremacy: Combat Racism, Change the World, and Become a Good Ancestor* by Layla F. Saad

Reports

- [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Reports \(2015\)](#)
- [Seven Youth Inquest \(2016\)](#)
- [Office of the Independent Police Review Director 'Broken Trust' \(2018\)](#)
- [National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls Report \(2019\)](#)

To cite this document: Patel, S., Hopson, R.L., & Saeidpour, S. (2024). *Enhancing Equity in Ontario Elementary Education Symposium: Equity for Indigenous Students - Knowledge Mobilization Summary Report*. Toronto, ON. School of Early Childhood Studies, Toronto Metropolitan University.

For more information, visit: torontomu.ca/educational-equity-symposium/