

# **“To feel pride in who we are”: How teachers and schools can promote, enhance and support Aboriginal students through using Aboriginal Fine Arts**

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This research will focus on what helps Teacher Education students feel comfortable and empowered when incorporating 'Aboriginal worldviews and perspectives' into their teaching of the British Columbia (BC) curriculum using Aboriginal Fine Arts (dance, drama, music, visual arts).

When speaking with teachers, teacher candidates and professors in the Bachelor of Education at Thompson Rivers University (TRU), a common theme that has arisen in relation to the new curriculum is the lack of confidence they feel engaging with the common thread of 'Aboriginal world views and perspectives' that is required throughout all grades and subjects (Kindergarten-Grade 12) (Ministry of Education, 2017).

How can classroom practices, teachers and schools promote, enhance and support Aboriginal students with programs to learn about our cultures and feel pride in who we are? There seems to be a lack of knowledge around traditional teaching and importance of fine arts that would benefit teacher candidates, teachers and thus their students.

Residential schools have taken away the family's ability to pass on knowledge around dance, drama, music and arts. Parents and grandparents no longer have traditional knowledge or access to learning about their culture and rely on the public school's teachers and Aboriginal Education workers to teach their children their language and culture. However, what do teachers do if they do not feel comfortable or know how to approach teaching Aboriginal fine arts? How does the local community feel about non-Aboriginal teachers teaching their children things that have to follow protocol? How does the university prep and ensure their Teacher Candidates are well versed and feel comfortable in teaching these concepts?

This research will create a program, curriculum and resources for classroom teachers to use with the BC curriculum, with the aim of enhancing and promoting indigeneity for the youth in the BC Interior. Intended outcomes are that teachers and teacher candidates will feel confident in implementing the resources that provide a rich background of fine arts so that Aboriginal students can not only relate to the curriculum, but also engage in life long learning. The idea of building capacity and confidence within the public school education system would allow teachers to take action now to indigenize teaching and learning practices to better serve Indigenous students.

The research questions are:

- What does it mean to teach “Aboriginal world views and perspectives” – from the perspective of Teacher Education candidates, and Teacher Educators and Indigenous community members, including parents?
- What Aboriginal fine arts teaching practices help Teacher Education candidates feel comfortable and empowered when incorporating ‘Aboriginal worldviews and perspectives’ into their teaching of the British Columbia (BC) curriculum?
- What changes does research in this area suggest are needed to teacher education in order to best support future teachers to incorporate ‘Aboriginal worldviews and perspectives’ into their teaching of the BC curriculum?

This research will use Indigenous research methodologies that focus on strengths in Indigenous peoples, knowledges and lifeways, service, and relationship (Kovach, 2010). The research methods will be qualitative and specifically use Storywork (Archibald, 2008) and incorporate photo voice (Wang and Burris, 1997). Both are participatory research methods that encourage narrative or story telling. Indigenous perspectives of storying include that the purpose of the story is to help others (Kovach, 2010; Archibald, 2008). The inclusion of photovoice is to help the storyteller-participants (many of whom may not be used to Indigenised approaches to storying at all or in Education settings) to begin the sharing of narratives that “identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique” (Wang and Burris, 1997: 369).

The first phase will be to collect stories from Teacher Education candidates, Teacher Educators and Indigenous community members on what it means to teach “Aboriginal world views and perspectives”. Parent input will be welcomed. Previous research has found that schools that encouraged a strong parental involvement had the best outcomes for Aboriginal students to succeed academically.

The second phase will involve Teacher Education candidates using storytelling and photovoice to describe times when they have learned and taught “Aboriginal world views and perspectives” and the outcomes.

Drawing on information gathered in the first two phases, we will go on to the third phase in the research: the creation and critical evaluation of a program, curriculum and resources for classroom teachers to use with the BC curriculum, incorporating ‘Aboriginal worldviews and perspectives’.

## References

- Archibald, J. (2008). *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*. Don Mills, Canada: Oxford University Press.
- Kovach, M. (2010). Conversational Method in Indigenous Research. *First peoples child and family review*. 5:1, 2010, pp.40-48.
- Ministry of Education. (2017). *BC’s new curriculum*. Retrieved from <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca>. 15 September 2017.

Wang, C., & Burris, M. (1997). Photovoice: concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education & Behavior, 24*: 3, 369-387.