

Cross-Curricular, Inquiry-Based Collaborative Learning in Support of Truth and Reconciliation

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Abstract

This project was conducted at Fort St. James Secondary School in the Nechako Lakes School District, which is in northern British Columbia, Canada. Three high school teachers from different disciplines (social studies, digital media, and carpentry) launched a cross-curricular inquiry-based project in partnership with local Knowledge Holders and School District 91, focusing on truth and reconciliation, which connected the learners in their high school with the broader community, including Knowledge Holders from the local Indigenous communities. Those engaged in the project examined questions around what truth and reconciliation meant to the learners and its significance. This project was completed in 2021, and resulting products included a legacy wall, installed as a permanent fixture in the school, containing individual learning represented in motifs, design of the feather using wood from around the world, and a video documentary containing interviews from school and community stakeholders.

Keywords: graduate project, truth and reconciliation, inquiry, secondary school, K–12, cross-curricular, project-based learning, collaboration, co-teaching

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We are grateful to live, work, and play on the unceded, ancestral territories of fourteen First Nations representing the Dakelh, Nedut'en, and Wet'suwet'en peoples. We are working diligently towards creating equity for our learners through conscious acts of Reconciliation.

We acknowledge and respect the Lək'wəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the University of Victoria stands, and the Songhees, Esquimalt, and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

Project Overview

Introduction

This project was conducted at Fort St. James Secondary School in the Nechako Lakes School District in northern British Columbia (BC), Canada. The first three authors of this paper are high school teachers from different disciplines (social studies, digital media, and carpentry) who launched a cross-curricular inquiry-based project focusing on truth and reconciliation. The project was completed collaboratively as permitted under requirements for the educational technology cohort enrolled in the Master of Education (MEd) program at the University of Victoria (UVic). These project requirements also allow any media format to be used, with the exception of text being compulsory for the literature review section.

Context

We chose to examine truth and reconciliation, which is part of the BC Ministry of Education's Social Studies 10 curriculum (BC Ministry of Education, 2018). We chose this aspect of the curriculum for the following reasons:

- Truth and reconciliation is often considered a challenging curricular aspect to address.
- The examination of truth and reconciliation has not been locally tackled in a project-based manner.
- We have an extremely diverse school community that includes five distinct Indigenous communities (Nak'azdli Whut'en, Tl'azt'en Nation, Binche Whut'en, Yekooche First Nation, and Takla Nation).

Purpose

Traditional instructional methods are not wholly adequate when it comes to engaging high school students. This problem is illustrated in an article by Darling-Hammond et al. (2019), where they stated that learners need "meaningful work that builds on ... prior knowledge and experiences and actively engages ... in rich, engaging tasks that help them achieve conceptual understanding and transferable knowledge and skills" (p. 100). With the implementation of engaging learning activities, including inquiry- and project-based learning, learners gain various opportunities to expand their knowledge through collaboration. Darling-Hammond et al. further stated that "inquiry thoughtfully interwoven with explicit instruction and well-scaffolded opportunities to practice and apply learning ... [enables] learners to question, explain, and elaborate their thoughts and co-construct solutions" (2019, p.100). In the overview of the BC Ministry of Education Social Studies 10 curriculum (2018), educators are provided with flexibility in teaching methods and environments to support learners. The Ministry states, "Learning can take place anywhere, not just in the classroom" (para 29). Although the Ministry identifies what

must be taught, it does not direct “how to organize the time, space, or methods to teach it,” thus opening the door for inquiry- and project-based learning to engage learners in their educational endeavours.

The goal of this project was to connect learners in high school with the broader community, including Knowledge Holders from the local Indigenous communities, using cross-curricular inquiry-based learning. Those engaged in the project examined questions around what truth and reconciliation meant to the learners and its significance. Resulting products included a legacy wall (see Figure 1) containing individual learning represented in motifs, design of a feather using wood from around the world, and a video documentary (see Figure 2) containing interviews from school and community stakeholders.

Figure 1

Detail of the Legacy Wall, Fort St. James Secondary School, Nechako Lakes School District, British Columbia



Note. Students' various learnings about truth and reconciliation make up the feather vanes.

Situatedness

Our work was informed after a thorough literature review that spanned collaborative teaching and learning, inquiry-based learning, and project-based learning. Our graduate supervisory committee included both Educational Technology professors (Valerie Irvine and Michael Paskevicius) and an Indigenous Education professor (Jean-Paul Restoule), and we also worked collaboratively with our local school and Indigenous community members and Knowledge Holders.

Project Highlights

The [MEd project is hosted in UVicSpace](#), the institutional repository at UVic and contains a core document in PDF format with an introduction, project application information, and reflections. Three other PDF files contain the separate literature reviews of each of the three graduate students, even though one shared literature review would have been allowed.

Four video files in MP4 format (for an example, see Figure 2) were also uploaded to [UVicSpace](#) for longevity purposes, though we recommend they be watched on YouTube (links provided below). Each video has a specific focus:

1. [Project Process Video](#)
2. [Truth and Reconciliation Documentary Part 1](#)
3. [Truth and Reconciliation Documentary Part 2](#)
4. [Reflections on the Project](#)

Part 2 of the documentary is the core highlight of this project. A longer description of this project was published in the [2022 OTESSA Conference Proceedings](#).

Figure 2

Screenshot From the Truth and Reconciliation Documentary



Significance to Practice

This work should be of interest to K–12 teachers, community leaders, and broader stakeholders. The co-teaching and collaboration time was deeply impactful as a school-wide project on truth and reconciliation with benefits for students, teachers, and community. We recommend the education profession adopt measures to (a) provide teachers with greater opportunity to move beyond their traditional classroom boundaries to support student learning, (b) create a rewarding professional experience for teachers, and (c) meet our community responsibilities for truth and reconciliation in an authentic manner that more closely aligns with the First Peoples' Principles for Teaching and Learning (First Nations Education Steering Committee, n.d.).

Authors' Contributions

Conceptualization and methodology: DH, GS, AV, FP, VI; Project administration: DH, GS, AV; Writing draft, review, and editing of text: DH, GS, AV, VI, JPR, MP. Video planning, capture, editing, and review: DH, GS, AV, FP, CM, LP.

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Ethics Statement

This project was approved by the Human Research Ethics Board at the University of Victoria under protocol #20-0389, which required support from the Nechako Lakes School District and local Indigenous communities.

Statement of Other Approvals

Beyond ethical approval by the district, permission was granted by the local Indigenous community and by the school and district administration.

Conflict of Interest

The authors do not declare any conflict of interest.

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