

How do the 94 Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission apply to the work of school teachers in Canada?

The 94 Calls to Action apply to the lives of all Canadians. Educators, however, play a particular role in helping Canada to heal from the wounds caused by generations of abuse in our residential school system. Indeed, Justice Murray Sinclair, who headed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission stated, "Education is the means by which we will be able to fix this."

The residential school system did tremendous damage to our country. Today Indigenous people are disproportionately represented in our prison system, their high school graduation rates are lower, rates of violence against women are higher, wages are lower, infant mortality rates are higher, and a large percentage of Indigenous children do not live with their biological families. It is important to be aware of these facts, but one must also understand that there are always underlying reasons for such statistics.

Teaching about the impact of residential schools must extend far beyond the school system, at least for the moment. People working in government, social services, the judicial system, churches, the health care system, business and all who take part in forming our democracy need to understand their role in healing Canada.

Educators in Canada also need to understand the message of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but our responsibility extends far beyond our current generation. We are training future social workers, health care workers, lawyers, businesspeople, educators religious leaders and voters. We also teach Indigenous students, many of whom are impacted by the intergenerational trauma of the residential school system.

The most challenging immediate goal for our school system is to "close identified educational achievement gaps within one generation." (Call to Action 10i). Call to Action 10 also tells us to develop culturally appropriate curricula, to enable parents to fully participate in the education of their children and to respect and honour Treaty relationships. We are also challenged to revitalize Aboriginal languages.

This is no easy task, but I can see progress being made. To be honest, implementing these Calls to Action has made me a better educator and a better human being. I work in the school district with the highest number of Indigenous students in Canada, and in a school with significant Indigenous enrollment. I am especially grateful for the guidance and support I receive from our Aboriginal Education Department.

At the same time, there is so much work to be done. A 2016 report published by our School District is quite accurate. We're not giving our students the best education possible. (https://www.sd57.bc.ca/school/abed/Lists/Publications/FIASS_Final%20Report.pdf).

My role as an educator is pivotal, not only in empowering Indigenous students, but also empowering all students to make the situation in our country better.

It is also important to note that this is a global issue. Colonialism and ethnocentrism have not only left deep wounds in Canada, they have left deep wounds in our world.

How can I be the change? That is the question each of us must answer.