

Martin Luther King Junior frequently stated, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

As I reflect on the readings for this course, I see the truth in that statement. I graduated with my B.Ed. in 1985. The world was a good place then, but it is a better place now. The world is still far from perfect, but we are confronting issues today that most of us were not even aware of in the 1980s.

I intentionally chose to read articles that would show the progression in our pedagogical thinking. Indigenous rights, for example, were rarely discussed in the 1980s. We knew there were problems, but most of us had no idea that they were caused by the inherent racism ingrained in our society. People like Egerton Ryerson were seen only as great contributors to the Canadian educational system, we never questioned their attitudes toward Indigenous peoples. Ethical education at the time never questioned the morality of tearing children away from their parents.

Two events really changed our thinking in Canada. The first was the Oka crisis of 1990. The ugliness of our racism was broadcast on our television screens for all to see. It really was an extraordinary event. Why did anyone think it was OK to take land from another group of people to build a golf course? Why were we surprised when they took up arms to defend their land after all of their efforts to resolve the issue peacefully were ignored? As John F. Kennedy said, “Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable.”

I was living in Montreal at the time. I honestly couldn’t understand why there were not hundreds of thousands of people gathering to speak out for Mohawk rights, while throngs of people gathered to protest the fact that Mohawk warriors were blocking access to a bridge into the city.

I hope that things would be different if they happened today.

The other pivotal event was Stephen Harper’s apology in Canadian Parliament for the residential school system on June 11, 2008 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aQjnbK6d3oQ>). Even more profound is Jack Layton’s discourse on that day (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AVAxVhngTaw>), especially in light of the recent discovery of unmarked graves near several of these schools.

As a teacher, the 2008 apology meant that I could finally be brutally honest about our history without being challenged. We also knew, however, that the apology was only the beginning. We needed real change in our society and in our schools. I also knew that I had to make significant changes in my classroom.

These changes have not only made me a better teacher, they have made me a better human being. The changes that have resulted in Canadian pedagogical theory and practice have significantly improved our school system and must continue to do so.

The arc of the moral universe really does bend toward justice because there is something good inside each one of us that tells us to push in that direction.