

From Pedagogy to Practice Building Relationships Within Boards

[MUSIC]

TEXT ON SCREEN: Building Relationships Within Boards

NARRATOR: In the spring of 2016 a group of 20 students from the Toronto Catholic School District Schoolboard experienced northwestern Ontario for the first time in a partnership between Catholic school boards that aims to broaden students' experience.

NARRATOR: The program, Falcons Fly North proved to be a valuable example of how educators from different school boards can work together to bring First Nations, Metis, and Inuit perspectives into the curriculum.

TINA VISINTIN: So let's all go inside and grab a place, and grab a plate and--it started about a year and a half ago. as a superintendent I'm the student success lead for Superior North Catholic and we were in our northern schools Drillton, just doing walkthroughs and I started to go to talk to children 'cause one of the areas that we focus on is pathways. Where do you want to go in your future in your goals? So I talked to this one little girl in grade 6 and she told me she wanted to be a nurse. And she said she couldn't be a nurse because her family couldn't afford for her to go to school. And so I said we can't have that because we all should have in Ontario under our Achieving Excellence Document we should all have an equitable opportunity to do whatever we want.

So I started to do some reaching out. I met Jeffrey Grant who's superintendent for the Toronto Catholic District Schoolboard and talked to him about developing a leadership connection between Toronto Catholic and our board. He put me in touch with Greg Rogers who's the student leadership for Toronto Catholic.

GREG ROGERS: I actually had been fortunate enough to be involved in a number of student leadership programs and they've all been wonderful, and I guess in the back of my mind it's great that our students have experienced those international opportunities but what about in our own country? What's going on? What are some issues there that we need to better understand?

So through the partnership with Superior North Catholic Board this was the opportunity. So when we heard about it we said let's do it.

TINA VISINTIN: And we came up with an idea that we would because we're a Google board that we would start to have maybe some Google Hangouts with our children. So they got to visit some of our schools through Google of Aboriginal schools in our northern schools. So we had some dialogue. Our schools are very small and their schools are very large so there was a lot of dialogue around that.

Greg's students asked him where are they? And he said well they're in northern Ontario. And they asked if they could come, so Greg phoned me and he said they would like to come north. And I said well, if they want to come north then let's see if we can do that.

STUDENT: That's "Hello" in Ojibwe.

GREG ROGERS: How do you say? [Aboriginal word] okay, all right thanks.

VOLUNTEER: Yeah, now you take your other hand and now you go backwards. And then--

STUDENT: Up against your hand.

GROUP: 1, 2, 3, we are the [INAUDIBLE] in our friends. And we'll stick together to the end.

GREG ROGERS: I think ultimately that in education in Canada we want everybody's perspective to be included at least so that we have an understanding of what those perspectives are. If we don't give a voice to those perspective then what is that saying about our school system and our culture as Canadians? It's so important that our students if we're looking for international perspectives and so on we have to understand those perspectives in our own homeland as well.

NARRATOR: Educators now have better access to those perspectives. As of fall 2016 each school board in Ontario has a position that is designated to support the implementation of the Ontario First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework.

JACK NIGRO: The Ministry has made a commitment to Indigenous education by funding a dedicated lead to First Nations, Metis, and Inuit education. This is a key priority of education in Ontario as articulated by the ministry and the least position will hopefully move Indigenous education forward in a way that has not happened in the past.

KEVIN REED: Our school board has 11 high schools and 55 elementary schools. We have 19,000 students so in theory my job is to try to facilitate the inclusion of content and events in all of those schools.

NARRATOR: And to do that First Nations, Metis, and Inuit education leads pull from their own resources to support educators on multiple levels.

ANIKA GUTHRIE: It's important to have a role like this to support the teachers and the impact that, that can have on all of those students in all of those classrooms whether it's through professional development, or the coaching that I do alongside and the co-learning with teachers. That all trickles down to the student desk.

BETTY GUNNER: One of the biggest areas in which we can support teachers is to help them to become more informed about the First Nations, Metis, Inuit histories, cultures, traditions and perspectives and in order to do that it's my job to resource training programs, information websites, literature. Anything that would help them to become more informed about the students that they're working with and to be able to respond better to the needs of those students.

NICOLE RICHMOND: We're really interested in the TRC, the Truth and Reconciliation Recommendations and Calls to action and how do we integrate that into what we're doing in the classroom? A lot of our teachers are very excited. They want to do it. They're very excited. They are just telling me how, how, how, how, how? How can you support me? How can you help me grow?

TESA FIDDLER: For me that is what I need to hear. I don't want to force this upon teachers who might not be ready 'cause then it's not as effective. I want to make sure that we start with teachers who are willing to embrace it. Who are willing to engage in that relationship, that dialogue.

BARBARA-ANN FELSCHOW: I think everybody comes to the table with a certain amount of knowing but I think it's always good to have somebody in a lead role that you know you can phone and connect with depending on the size of your board, but I do think it's important to have a touch point for everyone.

NICOLE RICHMOND: My role is absolutely critical and I hear that all the time from teachers that they are relieved that there's someone there that they know that is guiding the policy, someone there that they can call if they have questions.

MICHELLE TYMKIN: One of the scariest things for teachers is all the protocols and teachers are--it takes a little while to figure all those things out so to be able to support the teachers in learning the protocol of offering tobacco, and honorariums, and then maybe the next time they'll feel comfortable enough to take on that project or make those community connections themselves.

CHRISTINE VANDERWAL: I continue to do lots of my own professional growth whenever there's an opportunity and it's sometimes just a matter of going and finding what's available because there's lots of support.

NARRATOR: With the assistance of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit education leads and other support staff educators have access to a long, diverse list of different ways to bring the education inside the walls of the classroom.

TESA FIDDLER: Right here, so that's in Robinson Superior. And so because you and I live here in Thunder Bay we are treaty partners with--I have worked with all of the teachers in our school board with a professor from Lakehead University. We've done professional development on Aboriginal awareness. So we have an Aboriginal Awareness 101. So giving them a snapshot of what our history is, what our current events and issues that they should be aware of and it's a real eye opener for a lot of

people, like a lot of teachers. They'd never heard of much of this unless it's what they hear on the news.

CHRISTINA BREEN: Over the last couple of years I've developed and delivered sessions on treaties, wampum, residential schools, I've done work on implementing the social studies curriculum for our kindergarten to grade 8 teachers. So providing them with opportunities, activities and lesson strategies about how they can bring those things into their classrooms with foundational Indigenous knowledge but also really helping them understand pedagogical approaches to Indigenous ways of knowing, teaching, and learning.

MICHELLE TYMKIN: We do culture competency training, work with them with the Aboriginal Teachers Toolkit. I had participated in a blanket exercise just a few weeks ago within the community with the hope that we'll be able to bring that to the school level.

Bringing those experiences back to the school level, to our board and then hoping that working with those first that are interested and then hopefully we can carry on.

TAMMY HARDWICK: I've gone into classrooms, so going in and actually working with the teachers to provide them with resources that they can use to make sure that what the students are receiving is done in a good way so that those supports are in place and also helping them to develop lessons, looking at that inquiry based learning and giving them opportunity to collaborate with one another.

KEVIN REED: We bring teachers into the school board to give them background and give them strategies. We in our board have developed resource packages to help teachers. So we developed a package called Getting to Know Turtle Island for elementary school teachers. That document gives them three unit plans that they could engage in at every grade level to give them a hand on how they might incorporate Aboriginal content into their classrooms. But we've also gone out of our way to develop programs or resource packages for some of the mandatory secondary school programs like English, Geography, History, Civics, and we've just completed our Art document.

NICOLE RICHMOND: So very recently we had Pamela Toulouse from Laurentian University come in and she talked to our history teachers about how to teach about residential schools. And what she said, her message was beautiful was that you don't need to be the expert. All you need to do is bridge. Bring the learners to the learning because we're in a different era in terms of access to information on the internet, and resourcing. So the teachers necessarily don't need to be the expert per se, but they need to be the leader in the inquiry process.

NARRATOR: And the support that First Nations, Metis, and Inuit education leads supply can go even deeper when they bring their knowledge to an administrative level. They can help to build foundations for how to approach material that can be sensitive at times.

BARBARA-ANN FELSCHOW: By listening, observing, and not pushing a personal agenda that's really how you continue to build relationship. and for administrators being in community environments, by going out and not necessarily staying in your space within the school facility but going out and showing that you're not within the parameters of a 9-5 schedule, that you understand about a 12 month or 13 moon cycle. That you understand a little bit more about what it means to have connection to the Earth. That you understand Indigenous world views.

NICOLE RICHMOND: There's been a history of mistrust between education bodies and First Nations communities and that's a history that we're beginning to explore and we're beginning to understand the implications of it. And so building bridges and building trust is absolutely foundational if in a school board that's as populated with First Nations, Metis, Inuit learners as ours we absolutely must be doing this if we want to be responsive as a community and as a public education board.

TAMMY HARDWICK: What that might involve is doing professional development with teachers and staff, or with administrators as well when we look at working with community I like to hear the voice of the caregivers, the parents, and also work with community members in reaching out to our elders and our knowledge keepers so that we insure that we're bringing in that authentic voice.

CHRISTINA BREEN: I see myself being in a position to facilitate learning and always being aware at the same time that I'm learning as well and I'm refining my practice, and I'm taking just as much out of that experience as I'm giving into it. So how can we extend this? Who can we bring in to accentuate the learning from the community? What other types of resources could we bring in?

JACK NIGRO: One example of a structure that we have in education that allows us to state priorities in our year to year work is the school improvement plan. In our board we are asking our principals to think about a school improvement plan goal to incorporate into their SIP for next year, and we are asking them to think broadly about that goal considering where they are in their work in Indigenous education recognizing that some are further ahead than others, some are at the very beginning stages and that's okay. What we're asking is that they in articulating such a goal make progress from year to year.

CHRISTINA BREEN: So we do Aboriginal education walkthroughs where we look around the building, look at how Indigenous peoples are being represented and then based on some of the gaps determining some really achievable goals within a school year and embedding those into the school improvement plan.

NARRATOR: Having a unique school improvement plan in place helps to inform administrative personnel for a variety of different ways that they can provide specific support for educators.

LUISA BOTELHO: One of the ways as a vice principal to support your teachers is to be able to be there for them and for the students making sure that they have the appropriate resources and time so that they can integrate Indigenous perspective

into the work that they do every day. I think that if I am aware of barriers and challenges support them in removing those so that, that education piece is happening in our building and in our system.

JENNIFER OUSSOREN: We have kind of formal sessions on PD days or at staff meetings where we talk about sort of local history, local issues. We do also provide opportunities for teachers to shadow each other. So if they don't have a comfort level or a knowledge in a certain area then we make sure that we fill in those gaps. It's pretty personalized 'cause we're in a small school so we know who our teachers are and who's looking for and needing that kind of support.

JANETTE CORSTON: What we've done in the past is we've actually linked them up with a resource person to come into the classroom and talk to the students or help support the lesson that the teacher has decided to do for that day.

RYAN GATTO: We're trying to do more land-based teaching. Students are going out to different land-based experiences. We know that the way to engage teachers is by having them do it. If you don't have them do it they aren't going to feel that experience.

LUISA BOTELHO: One of the things that we do is budgeting and trying to figure out where some budget items could come from, who do we ask the budget support to come from? And so budgeting is one of the aspects that could sometimes be a challenge or a barrier for an educator and a teacher and so removing that aspect from it to making sure that students are accessing the education that we need and providing them with their voices, and the teachers' voices and making sure that we do incorporate the Indigenous perspectives in everything that we do in our courses.

NARRATOR: Implementation of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit perspectives is most successful when administration are engaged in support for the learning.

LUISA BOTELHO: The challenge for us as administrators is what will be our priority and how do we make this happen with everything else that we still do every day? And I think that we can't do it alone and knowing that, so you need to do this with a community. You need to do this with the local Indigenous people that can support us in bringing that to curriculum. So I think that that's great that we're going to have an official curriculum. I think that supports our work and validates the work that it will happen, but I think we need something living that comes with the curriculum and that living piece is the partnership with the curriculum piece.

So when we're presenting, when the Ministry is launching let's say and having those information sessions it needs to be a room full of knowledge seekers or elders so that as administrators we're learning that and it's being modeled to us that it's beyond paper. It's based on human beings.

TESA FIDDLER: I think administrators have to be supportive. They have to be engaged. They really need to be champions and encouraging of their staff to be

engaging in this learning. Our leaders are our role models, right? So they set the tone of the school and they have to really encourage that growth in their teachers.

NICOLE RICHMOND: In terms of moving this whole Indigenous good will within education forward is having really responsive senior admin who take your advice seriously and act on the things that you think the community says.

JACK NIGRO: I found it really valuable to interact with other board leads and learn about things they are doing. It always provides a different perspective on what you're doing and how you might be able to do it better. So those connections with other board leads have been key.

NICOLE RICHMOND: It's about how do we meaningfully incorporate this perspective into our curriculum and how do we meaningfully make sure that we have board policies that are reflective of doing this in a good way?

NARRATOR: Once a system is established for the development of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit education within a school or a board educators and administrators gain access to deeper meaning around the benefits for learning these new perspectives and relationships are made to support student growth.

JACK NIGRO: I'd like to suggest that Indigenous education is everyone's work whether it be at the leadership level, in discussions with superintendents at the senior table, or at the school level in teachers' classrooms. In fact some of the best work I've seen actually involves a Native Studies classroom and a chemistry classroom talking about water and how that issue permeates some of our First Nations communities.

So does that make sense if you look at this graph that is more in Ontario than Nunavut? Does that number make sense? Okay, so what do you need to do?

When teachers embrace the responsibility of Indigenous education going across subject areas wonderful things happen.

TAMMY HARDWICK: It's been very positive. Any opportunity that they have to engage in learning about Aboriginal perspectives is something that is very positive and something that is desired by the teachers. They want to do it in a good way and I think a lot of the time that barrier is there in their minds that they can't move forward because they don't feel as though they're confident in the work to insure that embedding First Nations, Metis, and Inuit perspectives are in the curriculum and I think that teachers need to be humble about that.

When you think about the seven teachings thing about humility and if you acknowledge the fact that teachers don't know everything. We don't know everything in many subject areas but to be able to move forward and to learn, and to still engage in that curriculum that's a positive step.

SHERYL MATTSON: It's from a social justice and educational perspective we need to be including these perspectives because they have been denied and omitted for so long. And those are the types of things that I hear from educators, that how come I don't know this? I'm a teacher. I've been through university, you know? So to me that reinforces and it just helps to propel why we need to do what we're doing.

ANIKA GUTHRIE: Yeah, I just feel really lucky to be working in Aboriginal education, in education in Canada at a time like this. I feel like it's so significant historically and I just get excited as people start talking about things that haven't been talked about for so long and that need to be talked about.

MICHELLE TYKMIN: And I do see that it spills out to the other classrooms because the students are saying well when are we going to be learning about residential schools? Like my grandpa went to residential school. It's coming along and I think those teachers realise with the call for action and the Truth and Reconciliation that this is what has to happen. So I think they understand the importance of it.

KEVIN REED: I think that the cumulative work of the ministry and school boards around this in Ontario has paid off.

TESA FIDDLER: It's been a tremendous learning opportunity for myself as well. We've done a lot of debriefing ourselves in how this is going to grow next year, how it could possibly change. A lot of that constructive criticism which is just so valuable in this work. How is it going to be more meaningful for kids and teachers? Yeah.

TEACHER: 3, 2, 1, over your head!

GREG ROGERS: If you build it, they will come and that's exactly it with our students and the one thing I know about teaching for the past 30 years or so is that if you build a relationship whether it's between the teacher and the students, between the students and the students, or the students in their learning then the learning is going to be that much greater, that much deeper. So for me it's the starting point of relearning is the building of the relationship.

TINA VISINTIN: It opens their world to a different view. Different students, different experiences, different ideas about how they can make a difference in their community. So through this openness of a relationship some of our students in our schools have started fitness clubs, wellness events after school. So it just opens their mind to more critical thinking about what they can do to help and change where they live.

ZOEY: Today was I think mostly about showing our own leadership skills and helping each other build courage for themselves. Also their own confidence. So I think we've only had like five practices since we've started.

TINA VISINTIN: One of the students said well it's like a new birth today for a new family. So they're hoping to continue this dialogue. We're hoping to bring our

students in the near future down to Toronto to experience some of those activities that those students are available for them to participate in.

TRENEDEE: I know the relationships I've made with these people, they're gonna stick with me for the rest of my life and hopefully they'll be my friends forever.

STUDENT: I just tell you they're the most nicest people I ever met.

BETHANY: Building relationships with them is important because the way we live in Toronto and the way that they live here, it's a lot different. We always read about their culture in textbooks and we never really experience it, and we just hear about it and we see pictures. And a lot of images and stereotypes are created, but coming here by meeting them we break a lot of those boundaries.

TRENEDEE: Seeing all the kids and how positive they are, and how they're so engaged in leadership, and leadership for me is my passion so seeing them engage in a young age I'm like you're gonna be great when you're older because these values are instilled in you now. So I think just learning from each other and teaching each other it means so much to me and I can't even explain it. It's like the best feeling you get. Just being here, it brings up your spirit.

[MUSIC]

TEXT ON SCREEN: From Pedagogy To Practice

www.edugains.ca/newsite/curriculum/elementaryresources/socialstudies.html