Beyond September 30: Doing the work

For the Fall 2021 Zone Meeting Plenary, BCTF staff facilitated a panel discussion with four members of the Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee—Jelana Bighorn, Brenda Celesta, Brian Coleman, and Missy Haynes—around the roles and responsibilities of non-Indigenous teachers in helping to carry the weight of reconciliation and decolonization work all year long. Our hands go up to the panelists for their time and labour.

Attendees were invited to respond to three written prompts following the session.

This document contains themes from responses to each of the questions, along with a selection of direct quotes from attendees.



One thing I can do in my school to help carry the weight of the work:

Listen: "Listen carefully and amplify the message being given so that my First Nations colleagues are not the only ones carrying the weight." • "Make room for conversations and give time to listen."

Check in: "Check in with my Indigenous colleagues more, ask them what I can do to help."

Research and read:

"Do my own research and read as many books by Indigenous authors as I can."



Build relationships: "I will continue working to build positive relationships and I will ask how I can help carry the weight. I will also continue to support the work by reading, listening, and acting to create change and awareness."

• "Work to develop and build relationships with my colleagues. Be open, listen, and learn."

• "Support Indigenous staff and students in their healing journey. Use kindness and love to let them know I am listening."

Call out racism and embrace uncomfortable conversations: "Use the framework of 'calling in or calling out' and not be afraid of uncomfortable conversations." • "Be firm, consistent, fair, but engage colleagues in hard conversations, not shy away, or engage only with voices that agree with mine." • "Have conversations with colleagues who don't see this work as important so my Indigenous colleagues don't have to."

Share resources with colleagues: "Help settlers uncover resources that are available so that my Indigenous colleagues aren't called to explain everything." • "I commit to sharing the learning with my other settler and white colleagues, bringing the work to our regular meetings and also offering my work in other ways to free up Indigenous colleagues to focus on what they find important." • "Share my ideas and teachings around Truth and Reconciliation with colleagues and encourage them to also take action."

Learn about the land: "Learn about the land my school is on and teach what I learn to the students." *
"I can work on my land acknowledgements to ensure that they do not become rote, that they stay authentic."

Incorporate Indigenous perspectives/voices/ways of being in the classroom: "Including and sharing, as appropriate, the experiences and voice of Indigenous people in all discussions and decisions."

Address colonial practices within union: "I am going to look at the union processes that create a barrier to Indigenous ways of communication."

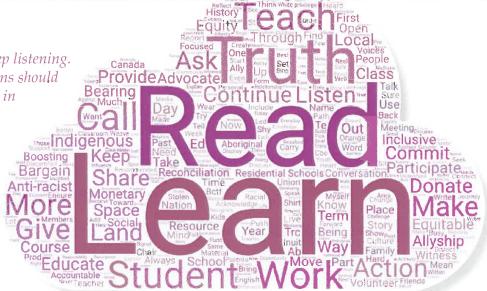
Recognize and validate diversity: "Always be aware that Indigenous people have very different experiences and perspectives."

One small action I can take to advance truth and reconciliation:

Educate self: "Keep reading and keep listening. It informs me on what my next actions should be in my personal life, in school, and in union spaces."

Move from learning to action:

"Move forward on my own journey and move through the hard emotions to functional action. Start conversations with other white people about truth and reconciliation."



Colleagues

Support Indigenous colleagues:

"Make genuine space to listen to

Indigenous colleagues and to ask the teachers how I can walk with them, step in to give space when time is needed for their own learning."

Keep own positionality and privilege top of mind: "I can become curious about my reactions and think about my positionality in relation to Indigenous colleagues. I will consider this in my interactions and actions."

Normalize using the term 'white': "Use the term white in a more normalized way to balance it against the term Indigenous."

Educate students: "I can teach my students about the achievements and successes of Indigenous peoples to show the vibrancy and strength of their cultures and the resiliency of the individuals."

Relationship building: "Making regular contact with the families of my Indigenous students with the aim of developing a positive relationship with them."

Land acknowledgements: "Learn more about the history (past and current) of the nation I live on and include that in my land acknowledgements." • "I have been writing a new land acknowledgement for every meeting I chair, to share from a place of learning and discomfort, with a focus on what it means to be on stolen land."

Monetary donations: "I have donated my full day's pay for Thursday, Sept 30 to an Indigenous organization." • "I can regularly donate to the Indian Residential Schools Survivors group [Society]."

Incorporate Aboriginal Ways of Knowing and Being: "Weave Indigenous ways of being and teachings into day-to-day teaching."

Continue wearing and displaying orange shirts throughout the year: "Always have an orange shirt on display in my classroom."

Listen: "My commitment is to listen with my whole heart. And then reflect so I can truly understand my relationship to the work and reconciliation."

Be responsive: "I will do my best to listen and make you feel heard when you generously share your experiences with me. " ◆ "To write back to their emails [...] I think it is important to treat

every one of their efforts as a gift being sent off into a potentially hostile environment."

People Indigenc Respect Aware Privilege Voice Challenge ove Relationship Colleagues

Decolonize Call Load Make space

Face discomfort: "I will sit and listen, to learn through my discomfort, remembering that my discomfort is nothing compared to my Indigenous colleagues' pain." • "To hold the load and re-direct the gazes of contempt during the difficult work (school based workshops/meetings) by being the voice that reminds my white colleagues that while doing this work it is their job to sit in their discomfort and learn from it."

Union Journey

Lighten their load: "To remember to ask, 'What can I take off your plate?' This really resonated with me today."

Leverage privilege for change: "To listen, learn, and use my white privilege to navigate, challenge, and change systems." • "I commit to examining my privilege and positionality and staying conscious of them in my relationships and actions." • "I commit to bringing antiracist work into my work as a Local President. I hold a position of power in this role and will leverage my social standing to call people in and use our local leadership to bring this goal into both the personal and professional lives of our colleagues."

Call out racism: "I will not let racist comments, actions, or procedures stand unchallenged." ◆ "Calling out racism, challenging white fragility."

Show solidarity: "To stand beside you and hold space." • "To continue to support motions and actions brought by *Indigenous colleagues.*" ♦ "Ensuring I am a visible and safe ally for teachers and students of Indigenous ancestry." • "Make sure it's clear that I honour and value and include the contributions, history and perspectives of Indigenous students and staff. Recognize that they are carrying a disproportionate part of the weight of this work."

Build relationships: "Make an effort to get to know them all better." • "To continue to invite them in, to gather with them, to hear their voices, to listen to them and their experiences."

Call others in: "I commit to call in others onto this journey. I commit to work beside and listen to truth and to hear need. I commit to more love in this hard work and less fear of failing."

Love and humility: "To help carry the weight of this work, provide a space where they can share their hardships and listen when I make mistakes or overstep." • "To continue to stand up, call colleagues out and use my power with loving kindness and model what it means to be supportive. Acknowledge my mistakes and be humble in my work."