

Treasure Mountain Canada Research Paper: Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy in the Library Learning Commons

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Part 1: Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy In A Racially Homogenous School

The Role of the School library in a School

School libraries are important spaces in a school community. They play a key role in ensuring the sharing and discussions of diverse lived experiences through books, partnering opportunities and displays. As a second year teacher-librarian, my belief in the important role school libraries play in starting, modeling and moving these ideas and conversations forward is affirmed daily. I wholeheartedly believe the school library has the potential to become the heart and center of the school community. Lyndsay Moffatt says the school library is like “the family room of the school” (Doiron et al, 2005). This ‘family room’ has a significant position; it serves the entire school community. Therefore, we must ensure that it is a space that is grounded in equity. Equity must be the overall expectation, an overarching umbrella. Equity is not something we ‘do’ every once in a while but rather the lens through which we intentionally plan and carry out our vision of the school library. My definition of equity is from the Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy document which defines it as: “A condition or state of fair, inclusive, and respectful treatment of all people. Equity does not mean treating people the same without regard for individual differences.” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009)

If equity is the ultimate goal in a school, then is there a specific framework that will help us strive towards it? Does this framework look the same in every school community? What role will the school library play in carrying out this framework and making it practical and accessible? These questions lead to my research question that I will discuss below.

My Research Question

This research paper will explore a research question I have had for a long time. It is a question that continues to push my thinking and consequently my teaching. In this research paper I will be exploring the following inquiry question: What does “Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy” (CRRP) look like in a racially homogenous school community and what role can the school library play in carrying it out? I will explore my own personal journey of learning about the relevance of CRRP in my current school community and share examples of it in practice.

This school year, I have been thinking critically about and exploring this research question. Through my learning, I have discovered that CRRP is a framework that can help us strive towards equity. This approach will look different in various school

communities but it is a framework that is relevant in racially diverse and racially homogenous school communities. I will discuss this further in this paper.

What is Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy (CRRP)?

CRRP is a framework that recognizes that the systems of schooling have often given privilege to racially white lived realities and experiences. These experiences become the 'status-quo' and make up the vast majority of the curriculum. Consequently, racialized peoples' experiences are seldom included in the curriculum, when they are it is often a surface level celebratory approach. CRRP is a framework and a "mindset" (Hammond, 2015) that is rooted in improving the schooling experiences of racialized students.

This is done by "using cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (Gay, 2001). Racialized students' experiences historically have been seen through a deficit lens and not included in the curriculum. CRRP believes that these experiences firstly need to be seen through an asset based approach and then be used to design curriculum and learning experiences that are relevant and engaging. Making school meaningful and relevant to students is a way to fill the achievement gaps which many racialized students can experience.

CRRP has the following three main tenets that are the heart of the pedagogy: having high expectations of all students, becoming cultural competent and teaching students to become critically conscious members of their communities. In my experiences of student teaching, supply teaching and now as a long term occasional teacher in Toronto, I have mostly seen CRRP being practiced in racially diverse communities. As a racialized person and a visible Muslim woman many of my experiences in school were ones in which my lived experiences were not represented. Rather, I often faced misrepresentations and felt as if I was sitting on the sidelines of school and looking into something that was not relevant or familiar. These experiences have taught me about the importance of being represented authentically but also the need to be seen through an asset based lens. An asset based lens simply acknowledges and affirms one's identities and does not focus on changing them to fit the 'status quo'. To be seen in this way is a powerful feeling.

CRRP is very important because it encourages teachers to be in a state of critical self-reflection. Sometimes in a racially homogenous school it is easy to ascribe to the idea that teachers are neutral. Neutral teaching can foster ideas around colour blindness that is an ideology that focuses on seeing students as being the same and not focusing on their differences. Statements such as "I treat all my students the same" and "I don't see colour" are common with this line of thinking. There can be a guise of politeness and niceness that works to ensure the 'status quo' is not disrupted. It is important to note, "there is no such thing as... neutral teaching" (Souto-Manning et al, 2018). Teaching is informed in many ways by our own identities, socialization but also the local and global

sociopolitical rhetoric. Therefore, critical self-reflection as teachers helps us consider our own positionalities to issues that inform our teaching practice.

CRRP in a Racially Homogenous School Community

CRPP recognizes the need to situate our work in our school context. My school is situated in the downtown Toronto area and the vast majority of my students can be identified as racially white and middle to upper class socioeconomically. There is diversity in my school community as there is in every school but it is important to highlight that it is still a community that is vastly racially homogenous. I have mostly seen CRRP practiced in racially diverse schools so I wondered if and how this would be relevant in my current school community. It was important for me to 'name' and 'label' the framework I was using to intentionally curate the learning experiences taking place in our library. I went back and forth in my thinking as I negotiated and tried to find the framework we were using or should use. I would often settle on the idea that we were simply employing an equity lens in our work. I thought that CRRP was irrelevant in my community because most of my students fit into the 'status quo' because of their identities. My students are a part of the dominant social group that has historically had cultural capital. This cultural capital can be seen in the curriculum as it is essentially designed with them in mind. Schooling is based on and built on my students' cultural reference points and lived experiences.

Furthermore, if the goal of CRRP was to ensure that students saw reflections of themselves in the curriculum, then this was not relevant in my school since my student's identities were always centered. I wondered if there was an opposite framework to CRRP that would be more suitable for my community? During this time period, I thought about these questions thoroughly, discussed ideas with mentors such as my current inspiring Principal, Andreas Ghabrial, to gain insight and I also continued reading and learning about CRRP. After many discussions, support and guidance I came to realize an important part of CRRP that I was not paying close attention to. One of the tents of CRRP is building critical consciousness in our students that is to help them become aware of their positionality and think critically about their communities. This I realized was how CRRP was not only relevant but important in my racially homogenous school community.

Critical Consciousness is a Tent of CRRP

One of main tents of CRRP is teaching students to become critically conscious members of their communities. Gloria Ladson Billings defines critical consciousness as "Allow(ing) (students) to critique the cultural norms, vales, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities... (it is a way to learn how to) critically analyze the society" (Ladson-Billings,1995).

Critical consciousness is essentially helping our students look at their local and global communities with a critical lens. While being engaged in the task of looking at their communities, students are prompted to question why things are the way they are and

what can be done to ensure there is fairness for all peoples. Although, one can feel nervous to engage students in these issues since it can be seen as disrupting the 'norm', the school library can play a key role in centering and modeling these conversations.

The school library can play this role because of its positionality; it has access to serve all students. School libraries can 'lead learning for the future', (Canadian School Libraries, 2020), by reinforcing ideas around active citizenship that is one of the goals of the library program. Active citizens are capable of thinking critically and acting to ensure fairness. In a racially homogenous school community, we must remember that our students in the future will most likely "occupy positions of power", (Swalwell, 2013), and so we must intentionally design learning experiences that engage them in the "critical examination of society (which) orients (them) towards justice" (Swalwell, 2013). This is an important strategy to interrupt injustice.

The section below will discuss how I am using the tenet of critical consciousness with my students in a racially homogenous school community. I will use examples to show how the school library can model how one can bring this theoretical framework into practice.

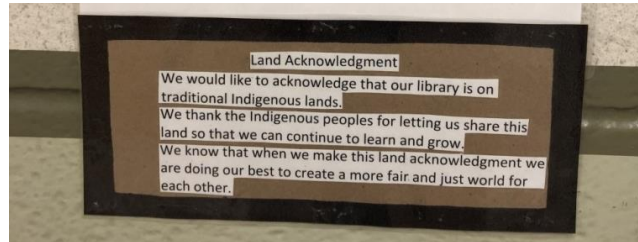
Part 2: Building Critical Consciousness in Action in the School Library

In the summer I read some articles connected to Truth and Reconciliation, (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), and the role schools can play in this important work. The overall message in these articles was the idea that "we cannot have reconciliation without truth". This message really impacted me and prompted me to consider my commitment to this work as a settler Canadian. I thought about my positional power as a teacher librarian and how I could use that to engage my students in learning experiences. My hope was that these learning experiences would teach my students the 'truth' and knowledge about Indigenous peoples past, present and future. This was my goal going into my second year as a teacher-librarian at Indian Road Crescent Public School. This was also a school wide commitment prompted in some respect by our school's name and the history it carries. Knowing this, we were even more conscious about helping our students becoming critically conscious members of their local community. The hope was that the school library would play a central role in starting, modeling and carrying out these conversations.

Preparing our Learning Environment

To prepare for these conversations with our school community we prepared our learning environment that acted as a 'third teacher' (OWP/P Architects, VS Furniture, & Bruce Mau Design, 2010). The environment as the third teacher sends messages of what is valued and highlighted in a learning space. Our Seven Grandfather's teachings, (Alberta Regional Consortia, 2020), carpet really centers the work we aspire to do in our space and often functions as a teaching tool. Our focus was also on our displays, book collection and forthcoming learning partnerships. In all of these focus areas, we wanted

to highlight diverse Indigenous lived experiences so we were not only sharing the single residential school story. We also did a lot of unlearning, learning and relearning so that we could teach our students up to date and factual information.



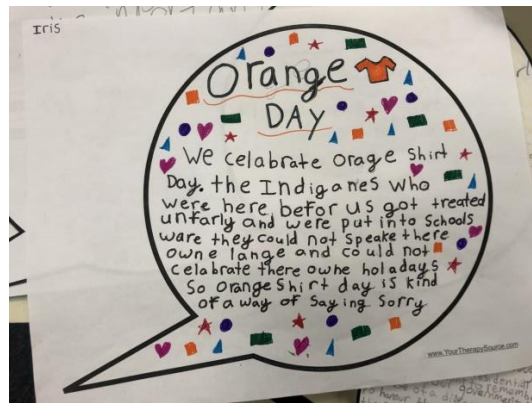
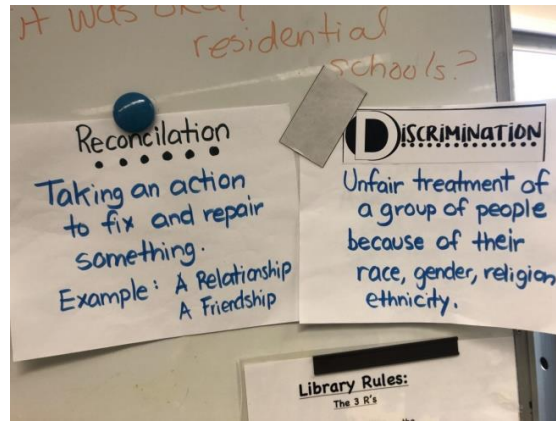
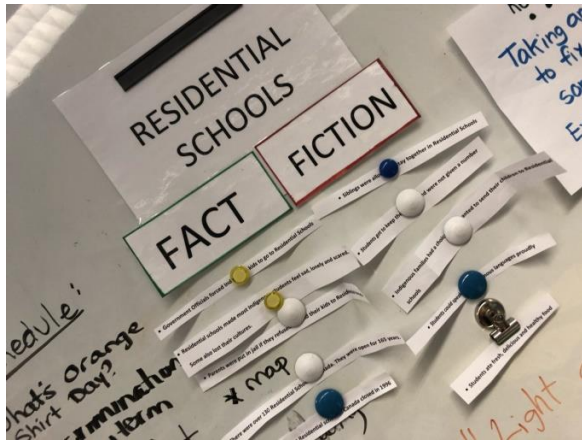
Orange Shirt Day Learning Experience

This year our school library offered learning experiences for primary and junior students in preparation for Orange Shirt Day (The Orange Shirt Day Society, 2019). Orange Shirt Day recognizes the legacy of residential schools and a way to honor Indigenous students sent to these schools. As we reflected from last year, we remembered that even though we had announcements and books displays about Orange Shirt Day many of our students did not exactly know what this day symbolized and why we wore an orange shirt. We took this as a need to help our students engage with the materials we were putting out and to fill the gaps in their learning in an age appropriate way.

During our primary Orange Shirt Day learning opportunity, the goal was for our youngest students to learn what residential schools were and then to see how unfair they were. To carry this out, first we showed our students a picture of our school and their job was to tell us everything they loved about our school. Many students said they love the teachers, pizza lunch day and recess! We then gently told students that there were schools that were very unfair and Indigenous students were forced to go to them. We followed with a read aloud and throughout helped students make connections so they could empathize with and humanize Indigenous student's experiences. We asked guiding questions like "How would you feel if you had to be away from your family and pets for a long time? And "Did you buy any back to school items? How would you feel if they were taken away?" Students did an activity where they reflected on how every student should feel at school. Words like 'safe', 'respected' and loved' came up a lot.

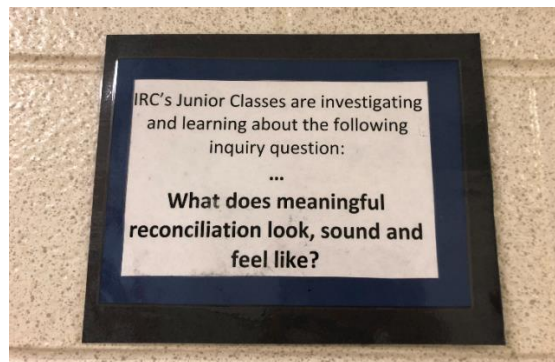


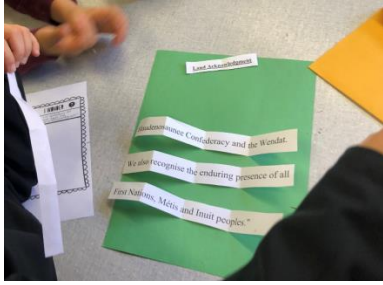
For our Junior Orange Shirt Day learning experience, our focus was really to teach our students the history of the injustice faced by Indigenous communities in the past and present. Through a Residential Schools' fact and fiction game, students learned about the historic and current discrimination faced by Indigenous communities. Some students were surprised that the Canadian government made laws that forced Indigenous children to go to Residential Schools because their cultures and traditions were not valued and seen as being backwards from the status quo. Students said the government "wanted to remove their Indigenous identity". Students learned important words during this learning experience like discrimination, reconciliation and what it means to be an ally with Indigenous people and not for them. Students did an independent reflection on the following question: How is Orange Shirt Day an act of reconciliation?



Formation of a Library Inquiry Question

As we engaged in the Orange Shirt Day learning experiences, we recognized that it actually became a springboard for the learning partnerships we wanted to have with our junior classes this term. We formed a library Inquiry question that we would explore with students. Our question was: What does meaningful reconciliation look, sound and feel like? Our inquiry question quite organically brought forth further learning experiences that really guided our work.





Land Acknowledgment Activity

To help our students continue on their path to learning the truth to work towards reconciliation, we designed a land acknowledgment activity. We knew that our students listen to the land acknowledgment daily but we wanted them to critically engage with it so they could understand the story it tells them. Students were asked to think about who was here first on this land we know as North America and why this matters. Students were asked to reassemble the land acknowledgment and fill out a corresponding “I think, see, wonder” chart with their observations. Students wondered, “Does every school say the land acknowledgment? Are Indigenous people mad at us?” Our hope was that students would understand that hearing the land acknowledgment daily is important because it reminds us about the first caretakers of the land we are on and helps us think about our role as allies.

The Moccasins Identifier Project and Indigenous Presence

To further our Inquiry question, we partnered with a grade 5 class to do The Moccasins Identifier Project. The goal of the project was to critically think about ‘who was here first’ and reclaim Indigenous past and current presence. Students learned that a lot of the times Indigenous peoples are seen as being from the past, their histories are often erased, silenced and ignored. This project would disrupt this thinking by teaching our local school community about Indigenous presence visually with a moccasin footprints path. Before, students engaged in the artwork as a class we read aloud the land acknowledgment and definitions to center our work. After, students reflected that this was an act of ReconciliACTION because as one student said “a lot of the times people think about doing something to show they care, but we actually did the thing”. This project helped our students engage in an action in their local community as a result of critical thinking.

Treaty Recognition Week

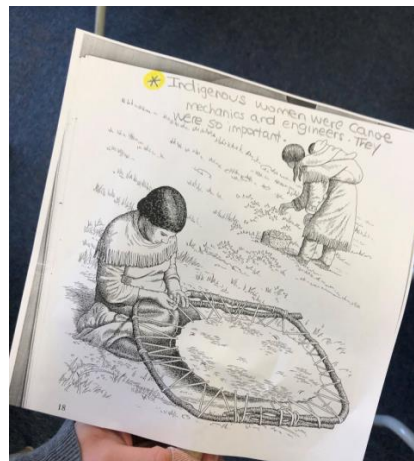
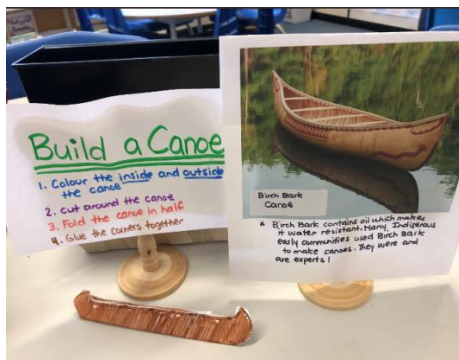
In November our school community recognized Treaty Recognition Week (Ontario Ministry of Indigenous Affairs Ontario, 2020). Our students learned that a treaty is an agreement and a promise. Students learned that historically indigenous communities and settlers signed treaties that established how they would treat one another and instructions on sharing the land. Students recognized that a lot of the treaties that were made have been broken and this is unfair. They learned that there are multiple ways to record history and all documentation methods are valuable. Students observed pictures of wampum belts and worked together to think about what the colours and messages communicated.



Expanding the story about Indigenous peoples

We were very lucky to have had the opportunity to order the Royal Ontario Museum Partners in the Wilderness EduKit (Royal Ontario Museum, 2020). This kit focuses on teaching junior students about the fur trade and interactions between Indigenous and early settler communities. The most powerful aspect of this kit was that it expanded the stories we knew about Indigenous women and their roles in the fur trade. Students learned that a lot of the times when we learn about the fur trade we only learn about the fur traders who were mostly men. We are not exposed to the stories of women as one student said “because of sexism”. Students reflected that it seemed that the women’s work was not valued. The kit helped us learn

about the ‘women’s work’ and we learned that many Indigenous women were canoe engineers and experts. Since the canoe was pivotal for the fur trade, Indigenous women played a very important role. It was important to learn these multiple perspectives!



Grade 6 Library Learning Centers

As we engaged in learning about and answering our inquiry question, we really wanted our students to think about the importance of disrupting the single story associated with Indigenous communities. Students learned that the single story was only seeing people in only one way and so this meant only positioning Indigenous people in the past and thinking they all have a homogenous identity. By sharing different stories with students that went beyond the residential school story we wanted to show how limiting and stereotypical the single story can be. Students explored these ‘different stories’ through the library learning center. While reflecting on our learning one student said “the single story is dangerous because it is about stereotypes and stereotypes may be passed on to other generations”. We were inspired by students’ engagement and thinking.

Library Learning Centers Menu Card			
Topic: Learning and Challenging the Single Narrative about Indigenous Peoples			
Learning Center A	Learning Center B	Learning Center C	Learning Center D
A1: Residential Schools • Change their story	B1: Families Language taken = Reclaiming	C1: Residential school Accomplishment (he became a name) Famous	D1: Save something (leave) • Still here (presence) Indigenous ppl still here • Being active
A2: Individuality • Identity • Challenging stereotypes	B2: Identity Think about what's "normal"	C2: Indigenous people chase their dreams (dream chasers) Resilience = HF P...	D2: to make a difference = Activist Someone who tries to make change
Residential Schools	Language and Naming	Accomplishments and Resilience	Current Activisms



Conclusion

Orange Shirt Day was a powerful entry point for further learning for our junior students. Our hope was that through these different learning experiences our students would continue learning the 'truth' and work towards meaningful reconciliation. We were impressed with our student's interest, ideas and their commitment to these honest conversations. Our students showed critical thinking, insight and exemplified critical consciousness.

These learning experiences reaffirmed our ideas around the important role school libraries play in raising critically conscious active citizens. Students who have privilege and access because of their identities have an important role to play in dismantling injustices and advocating for justice. By recognizing their positionality, they will understand that they can play a big part in creating change. A more just world where all people are treated with dignity is possible and our school library will play a central role in mobilizing learning for the future by raising critically conscious active citizens.

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