

WINTER 2025 | VOLUME 103 NUMBER 2

MBTEACHER

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**EMPOWERING STUDENTS,
CELEBRATING CULTURE:
MARIKA SCHALLA'S DEDICATION
TO INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

**AFFINITY SPACES
FOR IBPOC EDUCATORS**

**PAVING THE WAY
FOR INTL. DAY OF PINK**

**THE IMPOSITION OF
TEACHER NEUTRALITY**

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COVER STORY **EMPOWERING STUDENTS, CELEBRATING CULTURE: MARIKA SCHALLA'S DEDICATION TO INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

'Do I belong here?' Marika Schalla has asked herself that question many times. While great strides have been made in Indigenous education, the award-winning educator says that there's a long way to go. A language revitalization teacher at Isaac Brock School, Schalla launched Heartberry Education in 2021 to help fill the gap in Indigenous curriculum development, workshops and more.



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BUILDING COMMUNITY AND SUPPORT: AFFINITY SPACES FOR IBPOC EDUCATORS

There's no denying the impact of sharing your experience and perspective with someone who truly 'gets' you. For IBPOC and other marginalized teachers, however, those opportunities are hard to come by. Creating an affinity space is one way to nurture a sense of belonging and solidarity while advancing professional development, teacher wellness and effective advocacy.



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RE-EMERGENCE: PAVING THE WAY FOR INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PINK

Reflecting the harmony of masculine and feminine energies that dwell within all of us, the world's first Two-Spirit flag was unveiled last November. Its vibrant imagery conveys movement and story, representing the boundless energy of our spirits. Capturing the resilience and interconnectedness of all beings, designer Patrick Hunter reminds us that "we're all here to add our own verse to the cosmic poem".



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THE IMPOSITION OF TEACHER NEUTRALITY: TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES

What exactly does 'neutral' mean, and why are teachers encouraged to strive for neutrality in their teaching? Dr. Shannon Moore argues that educators cannot and should not abandon their lived experience and values as they enter the classroom, and that even if they tried the consequences pose risks to both teacher and student.

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PAGE 8

Allyson Fedak is the anti-racism and climate justice support teacher in the Winnipeg School Division. She has taught in middle years education and sits on the executive of the Winnipeg Teachers' Association, chairing its Equity and Social Justice Committee. She also sits on the Equity and Social Justice Standing Committee for MTS.



Ben Nein
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Ben Nein teaches English and technology at the Adult Education Centre in Seven Oaks School Division, after years teaching in K-8. They serve MTS members in a variety of roles, including on their Local executive and the MTS Equity and Social Justice Standing Committee. Ben completed an M.Ed. focused on Reconciliation and anti-oppression in 2023.



Stacey Abramson
PAGE 24

Stacey Abramson has been a visual arts educator for 15 years, 13 of those at Maples Collegiate. She has received awards from the U of M Faculty of Education's Alumni Association and The Canadian Society of Education Through Arts. She's pursuing her Masters at the U of M in the Arts, Community and Education (ACE) stream.



Wayne Davies
PAGE 28

Wayne Davies is the director of student teaching at the U of W. Prior to this, he taught for 32 years in a variety of settings, including on the Lax Kw'alaams reserve and in rural and urban school divisions in Manitoba. Wayne recently earned an Ed.d in educational leadership from the University of Western Ontario.



Shannon Moore
PAGE 31

Shannon Moore taught social studies and English in public schools in Vancouver prior to joining the U of M Faculty of Education, where she teaches media education, social studies education, and social justice pedagogy. She also co-hosts Public Good, a podcast about public education, and is a founding member of People for Public Education.



SEASONS CHANGE

Nathan Martindale

Looking back with pride
and forward with hope.

After many conversations with my family and deep reflection on their needs, I have made the decision not to run for a second term as MTS president.

Over the past twelve years of serving members full-time, six with the Winnipeg Teachers' Association and six with The Manitoba Teachers' Society, I have often been required to be out of town and attend numerous evening and weekend events, all of which have taken me away from home. As I considered their ongoing needs, including those of my daughter who has Type 1 Diabetes, I know it is now time to prioritize being present for my family.

During my time at MTS, I have had the privilege of contributing to several significant milestones that have shaped the landscape of education in Manitoba. Navigating the complexities of the COVID-19 pandemic required our union to respond with resilience, adaptability, and a steadfast commitment to supporting educators and students through an unprecedented global crisis. Successfully "slamming the door" on Bill 64 was a landmark moment, uniting educators, parents, and communities in a collective effort to protect the integrity of our public education system. Joining Manitoba's house of labour further underscored the Society's commitment to solidarity and collaboration, amplifying our collective voice within the broader labour movement. Achieving the historic first-ever provincial collective agreement stands as a testament to the power of determination and collective action, providing meaningful improvements for educators across the province.

One commonality across all these challenges is that I had the honour and privilege of working alongside fellow members and MTS staff as a unified team. The strength of our collective efforts, collaboration, and shared commitment made these accomplishments possible and underscores the vital role teamwork plays in advancing our goals. These experiences, while challenging at times, have been profoundly rewarding, allowing me to engage deeply in the work of strengthening Manitoba's education system and advocating for the growth, recognition, and advancement of the teaching profession in every corner of the province.

I am deeply grateful to a long list of individuals who have supported me throughout this journey, and I look forward to sharing my appreciation more fully as we approach the MTS AGM in May.

As I reflect on this journey and the future ahead, I am reminded of what matters most—my family. This decision reflects my gratitude for the steadfast support of my partner, Karen, and my commitment to better support her and our children in return. Family has always been my foundation, and it is time for me to ensure I am there for them as they have always been there for me.

From now through our AGM in May, I remain fully committed to my role as president and the important work ahead.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve. **T**

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FROM THE
INTERIM
EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR



THE JOY OF TEACHING

Glen Anderson

Even in the darker days of winter, there is still light.

While there's no formal, overarching theme to this winter issue of the MB Teacher, there is certainly a common thread throughout its pages, and that common thread is joy.

IN THIS ISSUE

And what better reflection of the joy inherent in teaching than our profile of Indigenous educator Marika Schalla (pg. 14). A language revitalization teacher in the Anishinaabemowin program at Isaac Brock School, she derives her infectious energy from myriad roles that include entrepreneur, masters student and parent—if teaching full time were not enough! Schalla shares how her journey to founding Heartberry Education began out of a need for classroom resources in Ojibwe and morphed into yet one more role, that of children's book author.

Allyson Fedak, a teacher at École Leila North, offers a powerful testament to the value, necessity and positive impact of affinity spaces for IBPOC members (pg. 8). Beyond defining and articulating the importance of affinity spaces, Fedak relates how the effects of systemic racism and inequitable, unseen labor compound the already exceptional weight placed on teachers today. Affinity spaces, she shares, provide empathetic environments where racialized teachers find respite from microaggressions and systemic tokenism to find community, connection, and a much-needed opportunity to recharge—for themselves and their students.

In a poignant portrait of the meaning of gender identity (pg. 12), Ben Nein, a teacher at the Seven Oaks School Division's Adult Education Centre, reflects on their own experience with gender identity. Through lessons learned and the process of coming out

(again and again and again) Ben refined their quest to create a truly safe and supportive classroom environment for students.

Then there's Stacey Abramson's heartwarming and funny story of how she and her Maples Collegiate colleagues became their students' students, learning the Punjabi folk dance Bhangra for the school's annual Diwali celebration (pg. 24). The role reversal provided lots of learning and laughter along with an incredible opportunity for students to share not only their culture, but their pride in it.

If that weren't enough, you'll find part two of Wayne Davies' tribute to creativity in the classroom in our Principal of the Thing column (pg. 28). Davies explores the vital role that creativity plays in making school a joyful academic experience for students, resulting in richer, deeper learning.

There is so much joy and beauty in what we do. As understandable as it is to get caught up in the challenges that are so much a part of our education system and the toll those things can and do take, we must never forget why we chose this role (or for some, why it chose us!). The light in a student's eyes when suddenly something comes together, where you created in your own unique way a connection to a young soul and all their precious potential, is something you never forget, and never tire of seeing.

In the darker days of winter, let's not forget to sit with those joyful moments and celebrate them. As Marika Schalla says so well, being a teacher "is the best job in the world. Coming in here, seeing these beautiful children, giving them the love and the education they deserve has been life changing for me. I'm so glad I became a teacher." ¹

BUILDING COMMUNITY AND SUPPORT: AFFINITY SPACES FOR IBPOC EDUCATORS

By **Allyson Fedak**, Winnipeg Teachers' Association,
MTS Equity and Social Justice Standing Committee

In the evolving landscape of education, affinity spaces for educators who are Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour (IBPOC) are a necessity. These spaces, designed to provide community, support and empowerment, are spaces where shared experiences can increase teacher capacity, understanding, and resilience. IBPOC educators face unique challenges in their roles, and affinity spaces offer a vital counterbalance, allowing them to thrive in environments that often marginalize their voices.

Affinity spaces are intentional environments where individuals with shared identities or interests gather to build connections and collaborate. For IBPOC educators, these spaces can provide more than camaraderie; they are crucial for professional development, teacher wellness, and advocacy. Designed to affirm experiences and cultural identities, and address systemic inequities, these spaces create a sense of belonging and solidarity that can be transformative for educators who often navigate predominantly white institutions.

SYSTEMIC BARRIERS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT

The challenges of teaching are significant for all educators, but IBPOC teachers

also bear additional burdens. Beyond the demands of managing diverse classrooms and supporting students with complex needs, as all teachers do, IBPOC teachers frequently face systemic racism and tokenism. IBPOC educators are often positioned as cultural experts, expected to lead diversity initiatives, mentor students of color, and educate their colleagues on diversity, equity and inclusion. While this work is vital, it often goes unrecognized and uncompensated, adding an inequitable layer of labor to already demanding roles.

This unseen labor also takes an emotional and psychological toll. Many IBPOC educators experience isolation due to underrepresentation in the workforce, particularly in regions where the teaching profession remains predominantly white. The

feeling of being “the only one” in a school can exacerbate the stress of navigating systemic inequities and microaggressions. Affinity spaces address this by providing a dedicated environment where IBPOC educators can reflect, recharge, and find solace among peers who understand their struggles.

In my personal experience, having IBPOC friends who empathize with the realities of systemic racism and microaggressions has been a source of strength. However, these friends often do not share the context of being educators, leaving a gap in understanding the specific challenges tied to being a racialized person in the teaching profession. Affinity spaces for IBPOC educators bridge this divide by creating communities where IBPOC educators can connect around their shared professional and personal experiences. These

spaces validate their identities and offer tools to navigate the layered complexities of their roles.

The benefits of affinity spaces can extend beyond individual support. These communities can empower IBPOC educators to collectively address systemic racism within the education system, benefiting students, staff, schools, and divisions as a whole. Systemic racism manifests in hiring practices, curriculum design, and workplace culture, perpetuating inequities that affect both educators and students. Affinity spaces serve as incubators for systemic advocacy, equipping members to challenge these inequities and advocate for change. By uniting their voices, IBPOC educators can collectively advocate for equitable policies, inclusive curricula, and fair representation in

leadership roles.

Affinity spaces also foster a sense of empowerment by celebrating the rich diversity of their members' experiences. These spaces not only highlight the challenges faced by IBPOC educators but also amplify their successes and unique contributions to the educational landscape. By doing so, teachers involved in these spaces can model these exchanges in their schools and classrooms to enrich the school community and create environments where all students and staff feel seen and valued.

Moreover, affinity spaces are essential for addressing broader systemic inequities within education. By creating environments where IBPOC educators can thrive, schools indirectly foster inclusive practices that benefit all students. Research consistently

shows that student outcomes improve when they see themselves reflected in their educators. This is particularly true for students of color, who gain confidence and a sense of belonging when taught by educators who understand their cultural context. Affinity spaces help educators bring their full, authentic selves to their work, creating ripple effects that enhance the entire school community.

EMPOWERMENT, NOT EXCLUSION: REFRAMING THE CONVERSATION

Some argue that affinity spaces are divisive or exclusive, suggesting that such spaces hinder integration or fail to address systemic issues directly. However, these critiques fail to grasp the essential purpose



and value of affinity spaces: they are not about exclusion but about empowerment and healing. For IBPOC educators, these spaces can provide an opportunity to step away from environments where they may be marginalized, overlooked, or burdened with the emotional labor of educating others about racism and equity. Affinity spaces foster community, validation, and collective problem-solving, allowing participants to build resilience and solidarity in a way that is simply not possible in mixed settings.

Rather than being a “band-aid” solution, affinity spaces play a vital role in dismantling systemic inequities. By offering a safe space for IBPOC individuals to process their experiences, celebrate their identities, and strategize for change, these spaces help participants reclaim the energy and confidence needed to advocate for themselves and their communities. This, in turn, strengthens their ability to challenge and transform inequitable systems in schools.

Importantly, creating affinity spaces does not mean sidelining allies or fostering division. Allies are critical partners in equity work but can benefit from initiatives tailored to their own learning, such as workshops, allyship training, and reflective spaces that encourage active listening and self-examination. This dual approach ensures that IBPOC affinity spaces remain focused on amplifying marginalized voices while still promoting collaboration and accountability across groups.

Far from being divisive, affinity spaces are an acknowledgment of the need for equity and justice. They are spaces where IBPOC educators can thrive, find support, and develop the strength to challenge systemic racism head-on. Rather than a retreat from the fight for justice, they are a powerful tool for building the leadership and resilience needed to carry the work forward.

FOSTERING EMPOWERMENT AND GROWTH: THE WORK OF AFFINITY SPACES

The activities that take place in affinity spaces are as diverse as the educators they serve. These spaces may host sharing circles, where participants share personal stories and strategies for managing burnout, or cultural teach-ins that empower educators with culturally responsive tools. Workshops



on anti-racist pedagogy, leadership development, and grant-writing provide practical resources to support professional growth and systemic advocacy. Affinity spaces can also include social events, like cultural celebrations and networking opportunities, fostering a deeper sense of community and solidarity.

Establishing and sustaining affinity spaces requires intentional effort from both educators and school divisions. Teachers interested in creating these spaces can start with informal gatherings to build trust and gauge interest. Virtual platforms can connect educators in rural or underrepresented areas, ensuring access to support regardless of geography. For school divisions, investing in these spaces involves allocating resources, providing funding and time for meetings, and fostering inclusive policies that prioritize equity and representation. Training for all staff on anti-racism and equity can further reduce the reliance on IBPOC educators to lead these efforts.

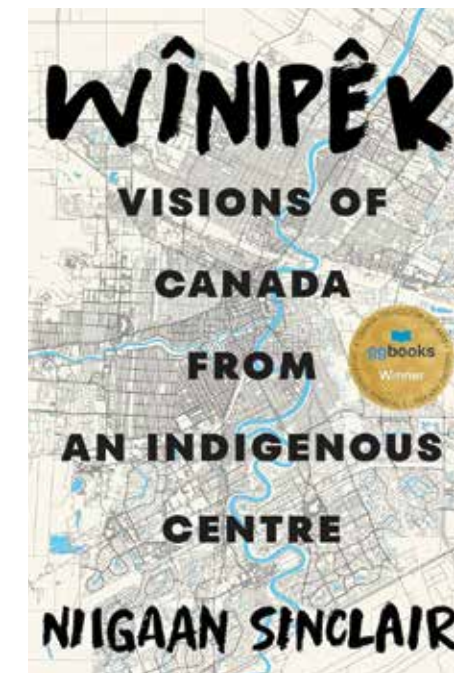
Virtual alternatives for affinity spaces can also play a transformative role, especially

for those in rural or remote areas. Online forums, video conferences, and collaborative digital platforms offer IBPOC educators the chance to connect without geographical limitations. These virtual communities can be just as impactful, providing a space to share resources, discuss challenges, and build relationships across distances.

Affinity spaces for IBPOC educators are transformative. They offer sanctuary from the isolation and burdens of systemic inequities while empowering members to advocate for meaningful change. These spaces affirm the value of IBPOC voices and their critical contributions to the education system. By investing in these communities, schools can create environments where all educators—and by extension, all students—can succeed. The collective strength and solidarity nurtured within affinity spaces are powerful reminders that no one navigates these challenges alone, and together, IBPOC educators can shape a more equitable and inclusive future for education. ¹

BOOK REVIEW

By Allyson Fedak, Winnipeg Teachers’ Association, MTS Equity and Social Justice Standing Committee



WÎNIPÊK: VISIONS OF CANADA FROM AN INDIGENOUS CENTRE

Author: Niigaan Sinclair
 Publisher: McClelland & Stewart (2024)

Niigaan Sinclair’s *Wînipêk: Visions of Canada from an Indigenous Centre* is a powerful collection of essays that examines the complexities of Indigenous life in Winnipeg and, by extension, Canada. For readers like me, who grew up in Winnipeg, the book feels both personal and transformative. This book is a blend of history and critical reflection that examines the city and its place in Canada’s past, present, and future.

The book opens with a reflection on the toppling of two statues at the Manitoba Legislative Building on July 1, 2021, an act spurred by the discovery and widespread news coverage of 215 Indigenous children’s remains at the Kamloops Residential School. Sinclair notes that these toppled statues were the first monuments on the grounds to recognize First Nations Peoples—ironically created out of statues celebrating Canada’s colonial past.

Sinclair’s writing draws readers into the complexities of Winnipeg’s history. While not a history book, *Wînipêk* provides

context to the present, illustrating how the city’s significant Indigenous population and systemic inequities shape its current dynamics. Sinclair describes Winnipeg as “ground zero” for Reconciliation in Canada—a place where both challenges and innovative solutions are visible.

What truly sets *Wînipêk* apart is Sinclair’s ability to balance a critical lens with an undeniable and profound love for the city. His writing is vivid, poetic, and accessible, drawing readers into the complexities of Winnipeg. His essays urge readers to move beyond passive acknowledgment of colonialism and racism toward active participation in Reconciliation. *Wînipêk* is a call to action, essential for anyone seeking to understand Indigenous life and the path to justice, and in particular Winnipeg’s unique role in Canada’s Reconciliation journey.

Wînipêk received the 2024 Governor General’s Literary Award for Nonfiction and was named a Best Book of 2024 by Audible, Spotify, and Winnipeg Free Press.

NOTICE of CALL



This notice is provided in compliance with Bylaw II of The Manitoba Teachers’ Society. The 106th Annual General Meeting of the Provincial Council of The Manitoba Teachers’ Society will be held beginning at 9:00 AM on May 22, 23 and 24, 2025, at the RBC Convention Centre. The Provincial Council consists of members of the current Provincial Executive and representatives named by Locals, the Council of School Leaders and the *Éducatrices et éducateurs francophones du Manitoba*. The number of delegates per Local entitled to attend Provincial Council is determined by the rules outlined in Bylaw II, Part I (1.7).


 Glen Anderson, Interim Executive Director

NORMALIZING PRONOUNS: A STEP WORTH TAKING

By Ben Nein, Seven Oaks Teachers' Association,
MTS Equity and Social Justice Standing Committee

Every year since I began teaching, I head into my classroom in August and set everything up to make sure that my space is inviting and welcoming. As I have changed schools and grades, from primary multi-age to adult education, my set-up has changed too. I used to worry about furniture, supplies, and what goes on the walls. Now I share my classroom with at least one other teacher and have far less wall space. I focus instead on all the ways we make our students feel welcome in ways other than physical design.

This shift began while I was questioning my own gender, then going through the process of coming out to my family, friends, and coworkers. I was now needing to give more information about myself simply to feel seen, and I was coming out over and over again. I was also correcting people, sometimes the same people and sometimes new people, even when I wore a pronoun pin. It was very tiring. I was also joining a strong community of folk who were dealing with the same struggles for recognition and respect that I was. Many more youths in my middle school were going through the same thing I was, struggling to feel welcomed.

Then there was the data. Even the Supreme Court of Canada has recognized that transgender people "occupy a unique position of disadvantage in our society... often find[ing] their very existence the subject of public debate and condemnation" (Hansman v. Neufeld, 2023, para. 85). We also know that 58.9% of transgender people report violent victimization since age 15, compared to 37.1% of the cisgender population (Statistics Canada, 2020). Moreover, 44% of transgender students seriously consider suicide and 34% attempt it (Price & Green, 2023).

However, there is hope! These numbers

drop by a third if youth have at least one affirming adult in their lives (Price & Green, 2023). This issue mattered in my classroom far more than seating or supplies.

I wanted my students welcomed as themselves, so I began asking students to share their pronouns aloud in class. This was not a great decision, putting students on the spot and creating tensions when some of my cisgender students were unsure of how to answer this question or rejected it completely. This approach often meant that my gender questioning/creative students and I felt less welcome and safe than doing nothing at all. I needed to do something, but not this.

I started asking my students to fill out a student information form, a version of which I still use today. I ask their name on school records, to use in class, and to use for home communication. I ask the same about their pronouns. All written, and all private. Students who were struggling to be seen as themselves but may not have been safe at home had a place in my room. Any students that had different answers for school and home could be safe in my room (and supported in coming out at home if possible). Since it was written, it quietened the voice resistant to pronoun discussion. I wanted to safely engage those resistant students though, and there had to be a way.


I was reminded of a person in my life that really wanted to support me. They told me that they were just going to use they/them pronouns for everyone from now on so they wouldn't get it wrong. It was a plan made with the best of intentions, and I truly loved them for it, but I also knew that their plan wouldn't work for so many people. It changed the way that I talked with my students about it. I started telling my students about

my friend, that their intentions were great, but that I was concerned about all the cisgender and binary transgender people that would be misgendered in using neutral pronouns exclusively. I wanted to make sure the cisgender people were respected too.

Simply including cisgender people in the conversation and making the system one that was designed for universal respect diffused many of my resistant students. I stopped getting the "I don't use pronouns" entries on my forms, and I even saw some surprising heads nodding. It helped build a bridge.

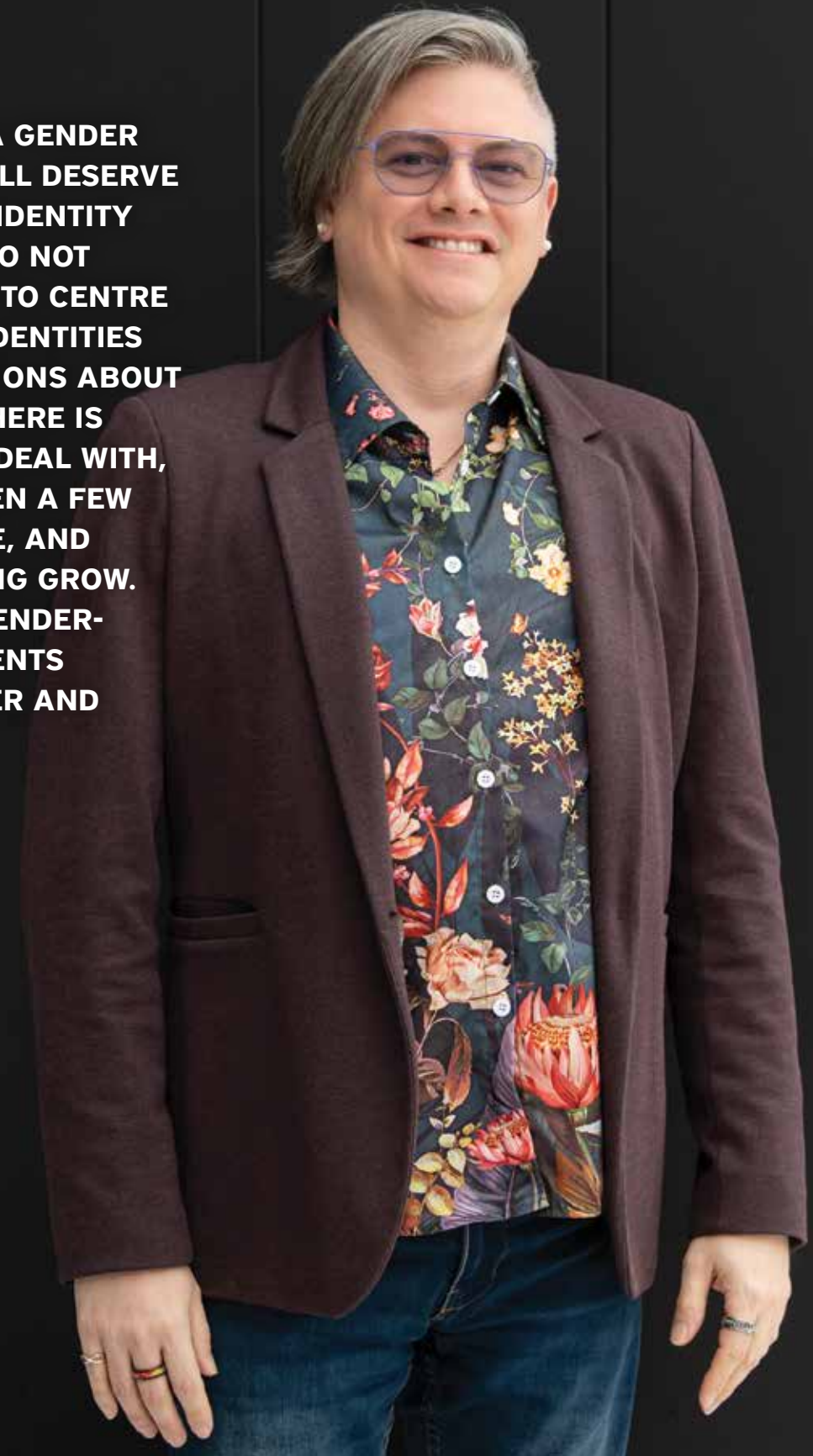
I have a class list with pronouns beside them on my desk for each of my courses. Since changing the conversation, almost every student has pronouns written next to their names because they're being shared on my form. It normalizes the conversation, and nobody is ever on the spot. Students have let me know (through in-class reflection logs) that there aren't other places where they get to hear their accurate pronouns used often or at all, especially those that use neopronouns. It's made them feel seen and welcomed, something that all of us want for our students. It has even kept some of my students attending regularly for the first time.

We all have a gender identity. We all deserve to have that identity respected. I do not always want to centre normalized identities in conversations about equity, and there is still hate to deal with, but I have seen a few minds change, and understanding grow. I have seen gender-diverse students breathe easier and smile more.

It is a small step, but every step takes us closer to a place where our queer staff and students are safe, welcomed, seen, and valued for exactly who they are. That is a step worth taking. 

“

WE ALL HAVE A GENDER IDENTITY. WE ALL DESERVE TO HAVE THAT IDENTITY RESPECTED. I DO NOT ALWAYS WANT TO CENTRE NORMALIZED IDENTITIES IN CONVERSATIONS ABOUT EQUITY, AND THERE IS STILL HATE TO DEAL WITH, BUT I HAVE SEEN A FEW MINDS CHANGE, AND UNDERSTANDING GROW. I HAVE SEEN GENDER-DIVERSE STUDENTS BREATHE EASIER AND SMILE MORE.





“

I GREW UP WITH A LOT OF LOVE, BUT I ALSO GREW UP IN POVERTY IN THE NORTH END, WE HAD FAMILY ADDICTIONS AND WE STRUGGLED. I WAS A TEEN MOM, AND I GRADUATED ON TIME WITH HONOURS. I WANT MY STUDENTS TO KNOW THAT THEY'RE IMPORTANT, AND WORTHY, AND CAN DO ANYTHING THEY WANT TO DO.

EMPOWERING STUDENTS, CELEBRATING CULTURE:

MARIKA SCHALLA'S DEDICATION TO INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

By Matea Tuhtar, MTS Staff

Marika Schalla's career in education so far has been nothing short of remarkable. From being a leader in Indigenous education and language revitalization to earning multiple degrees, she has been a passionate force in Truth and Reconciliation. Her work spans book writing, curriculum development, and running an Indigenous education business, while being a full-time teacher, mom and masters student—her fourth degree to date. Through her multifaceted journey, Marika has continued to turn big dreams into reality—and she hopes to inspire her students to do the same.

"My students are absolutely amazing," says Schalla, who is currently a language revitalization teacher in the Anishinaabemowin program at Isaac Brock School, one of only three Indigenous language immersion programs in the province. Schalla has been learning and reclaiming her family's language for the last 10 years and "I'm still learning, alongside my kids. We're learning together."

Schalla describes her students as change-makers, and leaders in the school and their division. Her kids have planned pow wows, performed drum songs at events, planned the Truth and Reconciliation and the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's Walk, and most recently attended the sacred fire at the Legislature to pay respects to the late Murray Sinclair. "I took 19 kids on the Winnipeg city bus," she says. "When we got there, they wanted to offer tobacco in his memory and we got complimented that this is the most well-behaved class. We get that compliment a lot."

FILLING THE GAPS IN INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

While teaching Indigenous education has been extremely rewarding, Schalla says she has continuously noticed a lack of resources. "I always teach about the Clan systems, because we talk about storytelling rights and responsibilities," she says, "and I was having such a hard time finding resources in Ojibwe relating to specific teachings." So, she decided to create her own—first a coloring book about Clan animals, and then a children's book entitled "*Stella Welcome to Your Doodem*". The latter quickly got picked up by a publisher and rose up the ranks of new releases for customs and traditions on Amazon.

The story centers around a young girl named Stella and her journey to find her Doodem (Clan), and teaches readers about the Anishinaabe Clan System and the seven Clan animals. Schalla says she's received a lot of positive feedback on her book. "I made the character more light-skinned on purpose, because there's not many representations of white skin Indigenous. You can be mixed Indigenous, you can be biracial and/or be BIPOC, and we need that representation. I have children in my class who see my book and they're like 'she looks like me'. I've heard that many, many times over the past year from different students—that they are so happy to see a character that looks like them."

Since 2021 Schalla has also been running *Heartberry Education* which provides Indigenous curriculum development, workshops, facilitation, land-based camps, youth experiences and education consulting. "Heartberry started as a mission," says Schalla. "When I was in university we had a class on Indigenous education, and I didn't feel like all my classmates were learning enough. I started leading little workshops during lunch time about different Indigenous topics that my peers could use in their student teaching practices and beyond."

COMMUNITY IMPACT

Schalla created sharing circle guidelines through research, talking with elders and community members, and her teaching practice at Niji Mahkwa School. "I got to go to conferences across Canada to teach it to other educators to use in their classroom. It was my first time on an airplane and to see the ocean." She also worked to co-develop the Your Voice is Power program created in the US through a handful of organizations including Amazon, and Pharrell William's YELLOW. The program was brought to Canada and Schalla, and fellow Indigenous educator Christine M'Lot helped to Indigenize

it. The two have flown to northern reserve communities to help spread the program. "It was life changing," says Schalla. "Going there was reaffirming that this is exactly the work I need to do."

Schalla's work in Indigenous education has been recognized through numerous nominations in recent years including the Future Leaders of Manitoba, Indspire's Guiding the Journey Award, and most recently as one of the youngest recipients of the Winnipeg 150 medal for the work she has done in her North End neighborhood. "I stood there talking to the other recipients and thought 'do I belong here?'," she says. "I felt quite the imposter syndrome and that's something a lot of Indigenous people battle with. But I know I'm on the right path and I've learned that I'm capable. I know I hold and bring forth the brilliance for my ancestors and their resilience."

LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE

While great strides have been made in Indigenous education, Schalla says there is still work to be done. "We still have a long way to go in terms of Truth and Reconciliation. We need more support for language revitalization. There is not enough funding, if we want our languages to be strong and our kids to be strong leaders, we need to put more emphasis and more importance on language revitalization."

Schalla wants her work to teach all kids that being Indigenous is important and that it's important to celebrate the culture and the languages. "This education is a recognized need in classrooms across Turtle Island, and I need to keep doing this work to strengthen our education system and help my fellow educators. And I have learned how to support my family through all the systemic barriers and challenges that many young Indigenous women face. I've learned how to work towards my goals but also how to center myself. I live

by the teachings. I've found myself through this work."

In the future, Schalla wants to get her PhD in Indigenous Education, though she's yet to decide what to center on. "Truth and Reconciliation, land-based learning, and storytelling—those are my three big passions. I want to keep writing more books, more curriculums, I want to do something bigger—a principal or superintendent. I know I have the skills and abilities, I have the mindset, I have the drive, I have the ambition. I want to be something bigger, something more."

For right now though, teaching is her happy place. "Oh my gosh, it is the best job in the world. Coming in here, seeing these beautiful children, giving them the love they deserve and the education they deserve has been life changing for me. I'm so glad I became a teacher, it's so fulfilling. It helps my heart and my spirit."

She notes that her class has had great attendance. "I want school to be the kids' safe place. I make sure they're fed, even if it comes out of my own pocket. If they need sleep, I got a couch for them. If they need comfort, they will get comfort. They know that they are safe and loved here, and that's why their learning is so big and beautiful and brilliant—because they want to be here."

Just recently her students worked on a writing unit about dreams. "I was writing down the big dreams I have had, and they said 'Marika, you've accomplished all your dreams!'. I said, I have way more now! I want to give them that inspiration and be that role model, that they can do anything they want with their dreams."

"I grew up with a lot of love, but I also grew up in poverty in the North End, we had family addictions and we struggled. I was a teen mom, and I graduated on time with honours. I want my students to know that they're important, and worthy, and can do anything they want to do." **T**

GENERATION E

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One of the best ways to build interest in energy efficiency is through interactive learning. Many students learn best when they can relate complex concepts to their everyday lives. By incorporating hands-on activities, you can inspire your students to think critically about how energy is used, and often wasted, both in the classroom and at home.

Here are two free ready-to-go activities you can use in your classroom to make learning about energy more fun and give your students a sense of control and empowerment:

Energy Ed and Jenny Jay's Manitoba Adventure: In this activity book for Kindergarten to Grade 5, students will meet two fun characters — Energy Ed and Jenny Jay — as they go on adventures with various activities to help them learn about energy efficiency. It includes fill-in-the-blanks, crosswords, coloring pages, word scrambles, and more to help translate classroom lessons into real-world understanding. Contact Generation E to order copies for your class.

Classroom Checklist: Help your students learn to be mindful about their energy use by using this simple classroom checklist with energy-saving actions to complete every day. Find the presentation, lesson plan, and printable checklist at [generation-e.ca](#).

WHY TEACHING ENERGY EFFICIENCY IS IMPORTANT

By engaging students early in discussions about how energy is used and how it can be saved, you're shaping a generation that will be equipped to make sustainable decisions for their homes, schools, and communities.

Plus, when students take these lessons home, they often influence family behaviors. It's amazing how much impact young people can have when they bring energy-saving tips to the dinner table. They might remind their parents to turn off unneeded lights, suggest adjusting the thermostat to save energy, or even tout the benefits of energy-efficient appliances.

Ready to bring easy-to-implement lesson plans and activities to your classroom? Check out Generation E's [free resources](#) today at [generation-e.ca](#) or email hello@generation-e.ca to learn more!

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RE-EMERGENCE:

PAVING THE WAY FOR INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PINK

By Anne Bennett, MTS Staff

Two-Spirit is a pan-Indigenous term that reflects diverse gender identities, roles, and spiritual significance found in many Indigenous cultures of North America, often encompassing people who embody both masculine and feminine spirits. – International Day of Pink

On November 19, 2024, The International Day of Pink organization held a very special event in Winnipeg celebrating not one but three world premieres:

- Canada's first Two-Spirit documentary, Re-emergence
- A new Two-Spirit curriculum, and,
- The unveiling of the first Two-Spirit Pride Flag

The Garden of Contemplation at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights formed the backdrop for the historic occasion marking the 35th anniversary of the term Two-Spirit. The event at which the term was created all those years ago, the 3rd annual Intertribal Native American, First Nations, Gay and Lesbian American Conference, was held right here in Manitoba.

MTS Vice-President Cynthia Taylor was among those who packed the CMHR on November 19 to applaud these milestone achievements and the individuals who made them happen.


"It was incredibly moving to experience the documentary and the unveiling of the Two-Spirit Flag," said Taylor. "And it was deeply moving to witness the ways in which diverse Indigenous gender identities have survived and thrived in the face of relentless suppression. Acknowledging and honoring the truth and existence of Two-Spirit people is essential to



creating meaningful Reconciliation."

Taylor encourages MTS members to check out the curriculum resources available at The International Day of Pink website. Information is available in both French and English at

<https://www.dayofpink.org/> or scan the QR code.

The International Day of Pink is April 9, 2025. 



Two-Spirited flag creator Patrick Hunter.

"WE ARE ALL MADE FROM STAR STUFF": HONOURING THE TWO-SPIRIT PRIDE FLAG

By The International Day of Pink Team

In 2025, International Day of Pink proudly celebrates the creation of the first Two-Spirit Pride flag, designed by Patrick Hunter to mark the 35th anniversary of the term Two-Spirit.

As Hunter notes, "We walk Turtle Island with these two perspectives at all times, and if they are in harmony, we can achieve anything."

The flag embodies the rich cultural heritage and identity of Two-Spirit individuals, emphasizing the vital importance of representation within the LGBTQ+ community.

The design features two stylized eagle feathers, symbolizing the harmony of masculine and feminine energies that dwell within all of us.


The two feathers rest on giizis, the sun, which illuminates our world, representing the boundless nature of our spirits.

Hunter beautifully expresses this idea, saying: "Science tells us that we're all made from star stuff, as old as the universe."

Circles within the design reflect the spectrum of visible light and celebrate the ancient artistic traditions of Indigenous

peoples, adding movement and magic to the flag.

Hunter's vision encapsulates resilience and the interconnectedness of all beings. He reminds us that "we're here to add our own verse to the cosmic poem," encouraging us to embrace our unique contributions.

The Two-Spirit Pride Flag stands alongside other iconic Pride flags, continuing the legacy of celebrating diverse identities. Join us in uplifting the Two-Spirit community, as we all find our place in this vibrant tapestry of existence. 

TWO-SPIRIT PRIDE FLAG


To purchase a Two-Spirit flag visit <https://jersvision.myshopify.com/products/two-spirit-flag-drapeau-bispirituel> or scan the QR code.



TEACHING RESOURCES



For resources related to Two-Spirit, the Intl. Day of Pink, the Brunswick Four, the Stonewall Riot or to connect with the Intl. Day of Pink visit <https://www.dayofpink.org/en/resources> or scan the QR code.






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HUMANACARE REBRANDS TO Kii

By Glen Anderson, Interim Executive Director, MTS

On January 1, 2025, HumanaCare, the MTS counselling and support services provider, is rebranding under the name Kii (pronounced key).

While the name of the service provider and the look of its promotional materials will change, all current features offered under HumanaCare will continue. In fact, there are a couple of very positive additions:

- The number of counselling sessions available to members and eligible family is increased from up to six (6) sessions with HumanaCare to up to 14 with Kii. This is a welcome service enhancement that helps ensure our members are supported by counsellors/therapists that they are familiar with.
- Kii offers a new service called MindBeacon (iCBT), an additional

therapeutic option that can be helpful for conditions such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD.

It's important to note that if you have been working with a trusted HumanaCare counsellor or therapist, and wish to continue on with them, you can do so.

All current features offered by HumanaCare will continue under Kii. And while there is a new telephone number for Kii, the contact number used for HumanaCare will continue to be functional as well. Either number will connect you to the services you and your family wish to access.

Like HumanaCare, Kii offers additional services such as newsletters and webinars. Registration with an access code assigned to MTS is required in order to sign up for those services. The code is included in

a variety of Kii informational materials, including a membership card (if you wish to download and print one).

These tools have been posted to your account in **MyProfile** at mbteach.org under Quick Links for easy access.

If you have any questions about the service itself, please connect with Dan Turner, benefit plans and programs officer at dturner@mbteach.org.

We're pleased that Kii will offer the variety and continuity of services our members have come to know, and we're excited by the service enhancements offered. Scan the QR code to check out the Kii website and explore all the services offered. 



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Carla Cooke and Tracey Salamondra, 2022 recipients, Whitewater Park Project

SEEING THE BEAUTY, BUT FEELING THE BLUES: IT MAY BE TIME TO TALK

By Khush Amaria, Ph.D., CPsych, Kii Psychotherapist

Some of us might find ourselves feeling the “blues” since the chill of winter and shorter, frosty days began. What does it mean to “feel the blues?” And is it more common in the fall and winter?

The blues are a mild and temporary form of a mood problem, that is more often experienced in the cooler months (for northern climates) and associated with feelings of sadness, low energy and lack of motivation. While similar to depression, the blues are often a result of changes in the environment and biological factors. Specifically, the reduction in sunlight exposure, changes to our internal circadian clocks, variations in sleep patterns and adjustments to our usual levels of physical activity can all negatively impact our mood, energy levels and general motivation.

It’s not all doom and gloom though. Understanding why we may be susceptible to the blues helps us build a response plan. This can include trying to maximize natural light exposure or finding other ways to ‘let the light in’. At times like this it’s important to stay physically activated, as exercise is known to boost mood and increase energy levels. Finally, trying to keep to a regular sleep schedule, despite the temptation to sleep longer, can help manage the blues.

For some individuals though, the blues need to be taken more seriously. Major Depressive Disorder, often referred to as clinical depression, also involves changes to one’s mood and sleep, yet includes other serious symptoms that can emerge in any season. Symptoms of depression include loss of interest in usually pleasurable activities, feeling down or sad more days than not, sleeping too little or too much, tiredness and lack

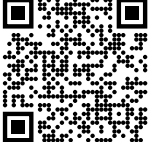


of energy, changes in appetite, agitation, restlessness, difficulty concentrating, feeling worthless or guilty for no reason, and thoughts of death or suicide.

Not all of these symptoms need to be present to be diagnosed with depression. Rather, the presence of such challenges and difficulties in daily activities such as work or social functioning may suggest that other supports, such as medications or psychotherapy, might be required.

Fortunately, access to help for depression is improving every day. Family physicians or nurse practitioners are available for medication consults. Psychotherapy can include self-guided approaches that are 100% delivered via the internet, such as MindBeacon (iCBT) offered to members through Kii, to more traditional, focused solutions provided in face-to-face manner.

Kii provides support to help you navigate these options. Whether through therapist-assisted iCBT, which combines the convenience of online therapy with professional guidance, or traditional counselling sessions tailored to individual needs, Kii providers ensure accessible and effective care. Connecting with others and sharing your experiences within your support system can also play a vital role in alleviating symptoms of depression and staving off the winter blues.

Remember, reaching out is the first step toward feeling better—and with Kii, support is always within reach. You’ll find more information at mbteach.org in your **MyProfile** account (under Quick Links) or scan the QR code. 

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BHANGRA BRINGS US TOGETHER:

DIWALI CELEBRATIONS AT MAPLES COLLEGIATE

By Stacey Abramson, Seven Oaks Teachers' Association



Students from the Northern Indian diaspora make up a large part of the community at Maples and Diwali Mela is an important celebration for their culture and community. Diwali represents the victory of good over evil and light over darkness.

When I started teaching at Winnipeg's Maples Collegiate in 2012, one of the first committees I became involved with was the Diwali Mela Committee. Other than a brief stint of study in Eastern Religions during a break from art school in the early 2000s, I had never been really immersed in culture apart from my own mixed Manitoba upbringing (Métis/Icelandic/Scottish).

Students from the Northern Indian diaspora make up a large part of the community at Maples and Diwali Mela is an important celebration for their culture and community. Diwali represents the victory of good over evil and light over darkness. It is a major festival celebrated by Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains across South Asia.

CONNECTING AND EMBRACING THE WORK

I was eager to connect with the students and staff to learn more about the community. I was starting to teach and was drawn to the incredible students and teachers seeking to celebrate and elevate their Northern Indian identity. I embraced the work and in return my colleagues and students embraced me.

When I first joined the committee, though, as is often the case when someone from outside of a community enters into their space, I was anxious and even a bit awkward.

When I went shopping for my first Punjabi suit to wear, I was nervous that I would look like I was appropriating the culture of my students. My good friend and co-worker, Jagdeep Toor, the Maples Bhangra and Gidha Coach and Learning Support

Teacher, put me at ease and let me know that it was quite the opposite—that I would see the happiness that a teacher wearing a suit would bring to the community at the event.

Toor also took time to share his own experience as an international educator, and what that perspective has brought to his work.

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATOR EXPERIENCE

"As an international educator, my experience is distinct, and while my educational philosophy shares similarities with others, it also has its own uniqueness," says Toor, who also co-organizes the Diwali Mela events at Maples. "The experiences and challenges I encounter as an educator differ from those of my colleagues, and we engage in discussions about anti-racism to create a positive impact in our teaching and foster meaningful change in our students."

Toor says the benefits of sharing and inviting all students and colleagues into the culture has made a fundamental difference to the school community.

"It deepens our human connection, our commitment to anti-racism, and encourages students to stay connected with their culture. For years some of the staff at Maples have shown a keen interest in learning the Punjabi folk dance Bhangra. Their dedication and commitment to embracing a new cultural art form are truly inspiring. This year, their hard work culminated in the formation of a Bhangra team, showcasing the power of learning and the unity it fosters within our community."



Stacey Abramson (standing, second from left) and her Maples Collegiate colleagues.

PREPARING FOR DIWALI MELA

To prepare for Diwali Mela, a group of nine teachers and educational assistants came together over lunch hours for two months to learn Bhangra. Most—like me—had little to no knowledge of how to dance in this style, so it was something very new, and challenging. Our patient teachers were also the students in our classes, who gave up their time and energy to choreograph and teach us the moves we would be performing together at Diwali Mela. It was a joy to sweat, laugh and learn together with the students.

One of our teachers was Anshreet Gill, a Grade 12 student. Her kindness, patience

and enthusiasm were infectious, and it was moving to be so deeply supported in my efforts.

"Teaching our teachers Bhangra was an unforgettable experience," says Gill. "It was amazing to see their genuine curiosity and openness to learning a vibrant part of our culture. Watching them embrace the moves with enthusiasm and effort filled me with so much joy and pride. It reminded me of how special it is to share our traditions with others and to see them celebrated by people from different backgrounds."

Gill is quick to point out how much confidence Bhangra has given her, and

how pleased she was to share its beauty with those of us for whom it was so new.

"Performing on countless stages across Winnipeg has been an incredible experience, not only showcasing my cultural roots but also helping me grow as a person," she says. "Bhangra has boosted my confidence and taught me teamwork, discipline, and the value of hard work—skills that I use every single day. It's inspiring to see our school fostering cultural pride and creativity, and I feel so fortunate to be part of a community that celebrates Bhangra in such a meaningful way. Bhangra has been a stepping-stone in my life as it has

helped me overcome so many obstacles and take pride in my identity.”

DIFFERENT CULTURES COMING TOGETHER

Other colleagues who come from different cultures also participated and found the celebration of Diwali through Bhangra very inspiring. Nerissa Manabat, a humanities teacher, feels a profound connection to our staff and students.

“As a Filipino Canadian, I grew up surrounded by Filipino and Indian friends. This made teaching at Maples Collegiate, a school with a vibrant Indian community, deeply personal for me. I’m grateful to the students who taught us the dance and to my colleagues who made this opportunity possible. There were plenty of laughs as we put the moves together, along with some memorable “wardrobe malfunctions,” Manabat laughed.

It was particularly meaningful she says, to experience the impact the Diwali celebrations have on school culture.

“Performing Bhangra with our staff team was exhilarating and a powerful reminder of the joy that comes from embracing diversity. Growing up, it was rare to see a Filipino performing an Indian dance, or vice versa. Today, cultural exchanges like these are becoming more common, fostering richer and more integrative experiences,” says Manabat.

When it was finally time to perform our number on stage, all of us were a ball of nerves. Walking onto the stage in the Maples Commons, the bright lights couldn’t hide the big smiles and cheers from the families, students and community members in the crowd. As we exited the stage, the exclamations of gratitude and compliments flooded our ears—a feeling that spread into the following days and weeks.

Ikjot Uppal, a humanities educator at Maples, Diwali Mela Co-Organizer, and Maples Bhangra and Gidha Dance coach, agrees.

“As a colleague, it has been truly heartwarming to witness teachers coming together to practice and perform Bhangra,” she says. “Seeing my peers step outside their comfort zones to learn reflects their openness and willingness to celebrate something new and different. I am extremely grateful to work



in a school with such amazing teachers, who not only embody curiosity but also provide students with incredible opportunities to showcase their talents and culture. It’s a testament to how far we’ve come in creating spaces where cultures can be shared and appreciated, and it fills me with pride to see Bhangra bringing people together.”

Yasim Dhoot, agrees. The Grade 12 student reflects that sharing an art form that has fundamentally shaped her life inspires deep emotional bonds.

“Bhangra has been a part of my life for many years now and I honestly don’t know where I would have been without it. Bhangra is what gets me through those tough moments where sometimes you don’t know where to turn. It has always been there for me when the darkness needed some light. I’m forever grateful that a high school such as ours offers so many opportunities to showcase various traditions and along with that, our diversity. I can’t thank Mr. Toor and Ms. Uppal enough. Without them, none of this would have been possible.”

If we are taught anything in teacher

training, it’s the importance of community and connection. We talk of anti-racist education but often struggle with what that looks like in communities that we work with. When action and connection are authentic, it’s often accidental, coming from a place of genuine love and joy. The arts provide these types of opportunities if we are willing to take the leap.

The Diwali celebrations show how Bhangra can truly bring people together, says Gill.

“I feel incredibly proud to be part of a school as diverse as Maples, where the teachers are not only kind but also willing to engage with and celebrate our cultures so wholeheartedly. As I come to the end of my high school journey, I am thankful that I joined Bhangra in Grade 9, and I am super excited for the incoming students to learn about the Maples Bhangra Groups.”

Through teaching Bhangra to our teammates and staff we are able to build such strong and meaningful connections with one another,” says Dhoot.

“This is the true meaning of Bhangra. It’s not just the dance, it’s what surrounds it.”


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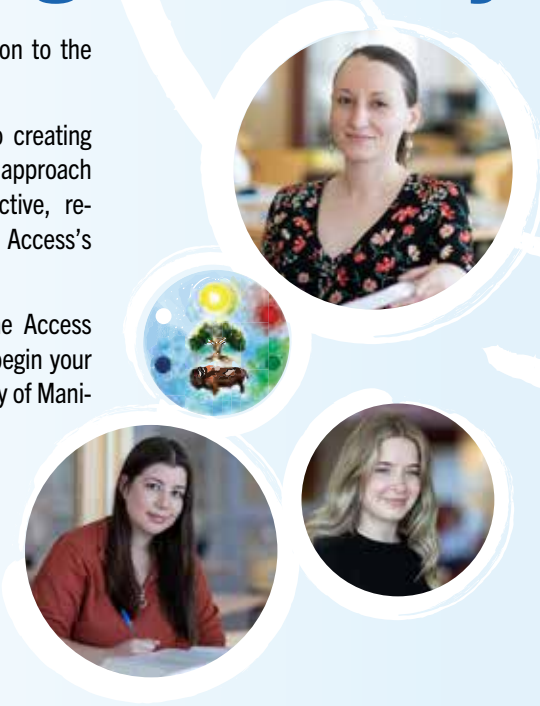
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THE PRINCIPAL OF THE THING:

CREATIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM - PART 2

By Wayne Davies, Ed.d., University of Winnipeg

As discussed in the fall, 2024 issue of the MB Teacher, creativity is an invaluable asset that makes all of our experiences better. Schools do not operate in a vacuum and as such, are encouraged to leverage community support to maximize their creativity with added resources and different ways of knowing and thinking. Together we truly are better!

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." This African proverb is a terrific place to rejoin our conversation on creativity and its importance to school success.

CREATIVITY IN EDUCATION AS PART OF COMMUNITY

It is clear in the literature that educator creativity is essential for developing critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and helping students develop more, not less, ability to adapt to new situations. These are vital skills in a world that is constantly evolving, creating new opportunities and building on old ones. Encouraging creativity allows students and educators alike to explore and express their ideas, leading to a deeper understanding and greater retention. Creative projects make learning and teaching both more enjoyable. Inviting community into a relationship with the school allows caregivers, neighbours, and community leaders to see the amazing things going on in the school. In return, the school accesses the community's knowledge, ideas and in many cases, resources.

STUDENT VOICE AND 'COLLATERAL BENEFITS'

Incorporating student voice in the development and execution of projects is essential for success. When students have a say in their learning, they feel more valued



and motivated. This sense of ownership encourages active participation and fosters a deeper connection to the material in front of them. Students are more likely to invest time and effort into projects that they helped shape, leading to higher levels of engagement and achievement, a lesson I learned only too well through personal experience.

I have been fortunate to be part of a variety of initiatives that leveraged student voice in their creation. The B.O.S.S. Guitar Works project at École Selkirk Junior High and a novice ASL program at Steinbach Regional Secondary School both caused

collateral 'benefits' for all those involved. Each was borne out of discussions with students trying to find a solution to an authentic problem in their world that they wanted to fix.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Projects rooted in community engagement are particularly powerful in creating meaningful educational experiences. These projects can bridge generation gaps, cultural backgrounds, and social groups, fostering a sense of unity and understanding. The key? Someone has to go beyond just admiring

the problem to seeing what is yet to be and creating the conditions for it to happen.

In the case of Windsor School, Principal Christine Stephenson discovered an immense amount of volunteer power residing in the community in the form of retired social workers, accountants, business managers, lawyers, and the like.

"We had volunteers support our K-3 literacy centers," she said. "The result was a reduction in 'lost time' for students as they had support at every center and an increase in literacy proficiency. I was very lucky to have a lead volunteer who managed the online volunteer schedule."

However, Stephenson was quick to add that when retirees arrive to volunteer, you better have a plan as they are passionate about 'doing' and not just 'talking' – a great lesson for all of us!

This spirit of community engagement was on full display during a trip to Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation this past spring where I had the opportunity to talk with Nic Campbell, Director of Education. I was intrigued by a program at Nisichawayasihk Neyo Ohtinwak Collegiate that sees two local men take students out on the land every day to learn a variety of skills such as fishing, trapping and navigation. Campbell said, "Students just do not miss school on those days!"

BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN GENERATIONS

Projects that build bridges between older citizens living in the community and students are also a testament to the power of intergenerational learning. For example, a project that connects middle school students with older citizens can be incredibly enriching for both groups. Students can learn valuable life lessons and gain historical perspectives, while seniors can share their wisdom and stay connected to the younger generation. Such

interactions promote empathy and respect, breaking down stereotypes and building stronger community bonds.

Principal Peggy Hobson, a nationally acclaimed school leader in Pembina Trails School Division, recounted several projects ranging from Grade 6 students and their phys-ed teacher leading Zumba classes for local seniors while other students collaborated with their older neighbours in writing songs and recording them.

"Currently, there is an increase in the number of students questioning if school is meaningful," said Hobson. "Infusing creative possibilities such as a variety of art techniques, purposeful writing, presenting, curating, constructing, collaborating, finding solutions to community problems into school subjects/themes, in addition to offering students' choice . . . are critical ways to increase engagement, result in deeper learning, and a growing positive self-concept."

Other initiatives cited included students helping seniors recount and record stories from their lives for their families and community. Some of this work at Charleswood Middle School included students learning about Alzheimer's and dementia and how they affect people in various ways. This powerful learning began with Hobson and a variety of educators including teacher Calvin Yong, who decided to let their creativity run free, which resulted in benefits for students, staff and community.

COMMONALITIES TO CONSIDER

In a session I delivered at the Manitoba School Boards Association (MSBA) conference this past year I spoke to delegates and members of senior leadership about the power of school boards to enable student engagement by setting the stage for success.

I told them that two specific actions

could be instrumental. First, make sure policies 'support, not thwart' the actions of those in the front line. The second was to put together small amounts of money with enough oversight as they felt necessary so as to seed ideas and reduce road blocks to success. Underlying this recipe for success are teachers and school leaders' creativity. Educators are incredibly creative people, hard-wired to find ways to achieve success.

IMPORTANCE OF BRAINSTORMING

So how do you come up with ideas? A brainstorming technique taught at the Rotman School of Management that can help ideas come to fruition breaks the process into stages. The first stage is simply to gather ideas – true brainstorming. Any discussion of the ideas is delayed until the next stage, but only after all ideas have been given a chance to fully emerge. Evaluation of the ideas and decisions on what to use or let go happens next with a final stage of adoption. This creates a safe place for ideas to emerge without immediately needing to defend them, yet still keeps a vetting process in place to seize upon the best ideas.

CONCLUSION

Creativity is vital to our success and that of the students we are charged with. Yes, teaching is stressful and challenging but being able to develop creative ideas and plans that make a difference for your students can help counter some of the challenges we face. Dr. John Hattie and his work on effect sizes has maintained that collective teacher efficacy is a powerful determinant of student success. A staff that comes up with their own creative solutions to meet the challenges they and their students face is a large part of how you will most definitely go farther together this year! **T**

LOOKING FOR PARTNERS

Wayne Davies is currently working on an idea which may be of interest to schools that have a multitude of languages spoken in the homes of their students. He is looking for partners to bring this initiative to life. Cost will be zero and it will be in the 'wide and easy to implement' category. Reach out if you're interested to w.davies@uwinnipeg.ca or scan the QR code.



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THE IMPOSITION OF TEACHER NEUTRALITY

By Shannon Moore, Ph.D.

Neutrality is neither possible nor desirable.

– Bigelow & Peterson, 2002

Throughout my career as a classroom teacher and a teacher educator, I have repeatedly heard different variations of the phrase, *teachers should maintain neutrality in their teaching*. Despite the pointed and thorough critiques of neutrality made by countless scholars, “the general public maintains a belief that teachers should be politically neutral” (Journell, 2022).

On the surface, this position may seem reasonable. It is a sentiment that has an air of common sense, one that gains power through repetition. However, it is not a view that withstands deeper questioning. For example: What do you mean by neutral? Can you describe a neutral classroom? Is the provincial curriculum neutral? Are

school policies neutral? Are there not some topics that require teachers to take an ethical stand?

Statements about teacher neutrality are loaded with expectation, but filled with misunderstandings about curriculum, teaching, and learning.

THE IMPOSITION OF NEUTRALITY

While many people assert the need for teacher neutrality, the term itself is often left undefined. In turn, there is no shared understanding of what it means to “maintain neutrality.” Yet, neutrality is riddled with varied connotations; it can infer a lack of

opinion, a middle position, disengagement, or a disarming of power (Heybach, 2014). Regardless of one’s interpretation, neutrality itself is imbued with values.

IMPOSSIBILITY

All education is political; teaching is never a neutral act.

–Freire, 1968

It is unreasonable and unrealistic to think that teachers can abandon their identities as they enter the classroom (Journell, 2022). Teachers’ lived experiences, core values, and underlying beliefs about knowledge all impact their classroom practices in myriad ways. Beyond intentional

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pedagogical choices surrounding curriculum and assessment, teachers' mundane daily choices reveal and communicate their values. For instance, teachers' clothing, accessories, classroom decorations, transportation methods, lunch choices, and technology selections all convey values to students.

Even if a teacher did their best to "void their classroom of politics," the curriculum itself is a political document. Values are woven throughout the curriculum (Hodson, 2009). Curriculum developers make choices about the events, stories, and people that are included. Subsequently, teachers make pedagogical choices that impact how this curriculum is understood. For example, curriculum developers may determine that it is important for all students to learn about WWI, but teachers' pedagogical choices will impact how students come to understand the war.

Beyond the imposition of the official curriculum, there exists a hidden curriculum (Eisner, 1985) in schools that is imparted through policies and practices. Consider, for example, how dress codes, reporting practices, or the daily singing of the national anthem in schools promotes particular norms and values.

Moreover, the null curriculum (Eisner, 1985) also imparts values to/on students. That is, the stories we omit, ignore, or exclude impact student understanding of who and what we value. Moreover, when a teacher avoids a topic or world event, they aren't being neutral; they are signaling to students that the issue is unimportant.

THE STATUS QUO IS POLITICAL

The status quo, often regarded as neutral, promotes and enforces specific values. It preserves its dominance by becoming so deeply ingrained that it becomes invisible (Giroux, 2019). As a result, some societal practices are deemed "natural" or "neutral", while anything that challenges these expectations is labelled political.

There is a misguided and unfortunate tendency in our society to believe that activities that strengthen or maintain the status quo are neutral or at least non-political, while activities that critique or challenge the status quo are "political" and

inappropriate (Ross & Vinson, 2013, p.23).

Those that label certain topics in the classroom "political" or "ideological" not only misunderstand the impossibility of neutrality, they ignore its imposition.

In the current context, curriculum materials that reinforce societal norms about gender are positioned as neutral. Whereas, materials that challenge current understandings of masculinity and femininity, or that represent 2SLGBTQIA+ lives, are positioned as political. Nobody launches the claim of "gender ideology" at curricular content that aligns with heteronormative understandings of gender and sexuality.

Yet, this content is undeniably value laden; it upholds the status quo. Labelling some content political or ideological promotes the idea that a neutral curriculum is possible. It is a political tactic that is used to secure existing power structures under the veil of neutrality and to make topics that challenge the status quo taboo or dangerous.

NOT DESIRABLE

Those arguing that education should be neutral are really arguing for a version of education in which nobody is accountable.

-Giroux, 2019

The expectation that a teacher should be neutral "should nag at the ethical soul of any educator" (Heybach, 2014, p.47). Why, Heybach (2014) asks "would teachers adhere to the metaphor of a disengaged gear—one sitting there with the potential to move, but instead resting in place? (p.47). The act of doing or saying nothing is not a neutral position. Students learn from a teacher's unwillingness to take a side, or to adopt an ethical stance, or to take action in the face of injustice.

There are topics that require teachers to take a clear stance. It is unfathomable, for example, to think that a teacher would take a neutral, or "both sides," stance on slavery, or gender based sexual violence, or residential schools. As Elie Wiesel poignantly states: "We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented." There are consequences to remaining neutral; inaction leaves an impression.

If a teacher refuses to take a position in order to appear neutral, they risk legitimizing an illegitimate position, making someone's humanity debatable, or undermining enshrined human rights.

OPEN OR CLOSED?

While some topics require teachers to take a clear stance, there are many topics that benefit from open deliberation and discussion between all members of the classroom community. Teachers must determine whether an issue should be considered "open" or "closed" (Journell, 2018). In the case that a topic is legally or scientifically closed, teachers should take a clear stance. Drawing on Journell (2018), teachers can ask the following questions to determine whether a topic is open or closed:

- Would having this discussion/debate lend legitimacy to an unfounded position?
- Are positions on all sides supported by evidence?
- Have (legal/scientific) experts already determined this issue is closed?
- Will inviting this discussion/debate harm students in my class?
- Do any of the viewpoints infringe on public values, such as those enshrined in human rights legislation, The Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child, which Canada ratified in 1991?

In the case that a topic is societally closed—for example, women's suffrage—presenting the topic as open or debatable would lend legitimacy to an unfounded position, invite harm through the discussion itself, and infringe on enshrined public values. Even if a teacher feigns "neutrality" within this debate, the decision to hold the debate in the first place implies that the issue is open to debate, which itself reflects a particular stance.

CONCLUSION

There is as much dogma in neutrality as there is in an overtly political stance.

Recognizing the impossibility of neutrality is not a license to impose one's view on students. Rather, it is about recognizing that everything we do is ideologically imbued, and thoughtfully considering the impacts of our pedagogical choices. **T**

NEUTRALITY WORKSHOP

Over the past two years, I have developed a workshop that invites educators and educational leaders to interrogate the myth of teacher neutrality. I have included a brief breakdown of this workshop and the materials that I use. I welcome people to facilitate this workshop in their own context.



OBJECTIVE:

- To probe the varied understandings of teacher neutrality
- To examine the feasibility and value of teacher neutrality
- To consider the imposition of neutrality
- To identify topics that require teachers to take a clear stance

STEP 1:

Ask people in the room to raise their hands if they have heard some variation of the phrase: Teachers should remain neutral in their teaching. Here is where we begin to demonstrate the prevalence of this view.

STEP 2:

Using a virtual or in-person poll, ask participants to identify their level of agreement with this phrase above: 1. Strongly Agree; 2. Agree; 3. Unsure; 4. Disagree; 5. Strongly Disagree. For the in-person poll, ask participants to place a post-it on the wall between 1-5. This demonstrates the variance of opinion in the room and offers participants something to return to at the end of the workshop.

STEP 3:

Within small table groups, ask participants to construct a shared definition of neutrality on a piece of chart paper. Once complete, ask groups to post these around the room so that people can view and discuss the similarities and variations as they stroll around the room.

This walkabout is followed by a full group debrief about the process of defining neutrality, the similarities and variations in the definitions, and the implications of these varied definitions on classroom practice. The small group discussions and the post walkabout debrief invite important discussions about our preconceived notions of neutrality, the feasibility of neutrality, and the value of neutrality in teaching.

STEP 4A:

Table groups are given cards (scan QR code for cards) within one of the following themes:

1. Arrangement of Classroom Desks
2. Assessment Practices
3. Curriculum Curation
4. School Policies & Practices
5. Classroom Walls

These cards include images or questions surrounding the theme. At their tables, ask participants to consider how the cards/theme

at their table communicates: the role of students; the role of the teacher; knowledge/truth; societal norms, values.

STEP 4B:

Participants are invited to travel about the room with one of the cards from their table. Their goal is to speak to someone from each of the other tables/themes.

The purpose of this activity is to demonstrate all the ways that we are always communicating values to our students. This helps reveal that there is no such thing as a neutral classroom.

STEP 5: SMALL QUOTE SHARE & DISCUSSION

Quote: *There is a misguided and unfortunate tendency in our society to believe that activities that strengthen or maintain the status quo are neutral or at least non-political, while activities that critique or challenge the status quo are "political" and inappropriate.*

-Ross & Vinson, 2013

Discussion: In the current context, what topics are labelled "political" or "ideological"? Who does this serve?

STEP 6A:

Large Group Inquiry: Which topics or themes do teachers already take a definite position on? How do we determine which topics require a clear stance?

STEP 6B:

In small groups, use the criteria to determine which of the topics on the right are "open" and which are "closed."

CRITERIA INFORMED BY THE WORK OF JOURNELL (2018)	TOPICS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would having this discussion/debate lend legitimacy to an unfounded position? • Are positions on all sides supported by evidence? • Have (legal/scientific) experts already determined this issue is closed? • Will inviting this discussion/debate harm students in my class? • Do any of the viewpoints infringe on public values? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Right of Women to Vote 2. Building Safe Consumption Sites 3. Vaccination for Employment 4. Interracial Marriage 5. Human Caused Climate Change 6. Opening Portage & Main <p><i>Please note: these are examples that I use with educators and educational leaders. Some of them are obviously 'closed' topics. I use these obvious examples to demonstrate that we already should and do take clear stances on some topics.</i></p>

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Journell, W. (2022). *Classroom Controversy in the Midst of Political Polarization: The Essential Role of School Administrators. NASSP Bulletin*, 106(2), 133-153.
 Ross, E. W., & Vinson, K. D. (2013). *Resisting neoliberal education reform: Insurrectionist pedagogies and the pursuit of dangerous citizenship. Cultural Logic: A Journal of Marxist Theory & Practice*, 20, 17-45.

BOOK REVIEWS

By Lindsay Stewart, Pembina Trails School Division



WILD PLACES: THE LIFE OF NATURALIST DAVID ATTENBOROUGH

Author: Hayley Rocco

Publisher: G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers (2024)

Wild Places is a beautifully illustrated picture book that captures readers with its artwork and also delivers an important message about climate change.

This story revolves around Sir David Attenborough's childhood love for the wild which evolves into a lifelong passion to explore, share, and protect nature. As Attenborough connects with the world through the screens of our televisions, his influence on how we understand nature and our impact on it grows.

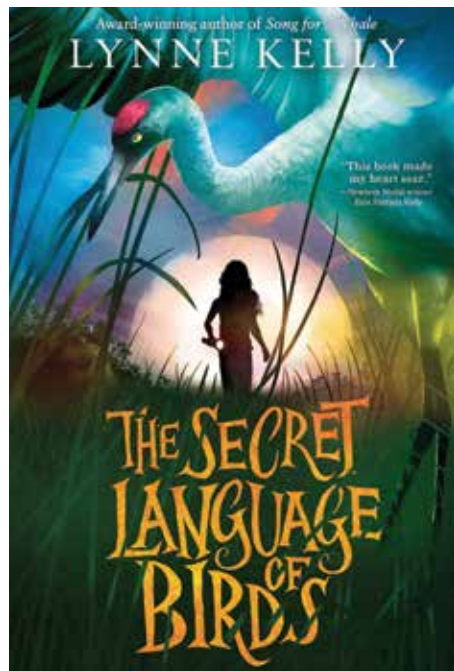
Each page is rich with John Rocco's detailed art inviting readers to pause and explore each page's complexity and message. The illustrations highlight the

beauty and vibrance of the wild and also its fragility.

The message of Wild Places is one of change and hope, offering a vision of a world where we can take steps to restore and protect the environment. It balances the truths of climate change with a sense of optimism and our collective responsibility.

Wild Places is a great resource for teachers who wish to inspire the next generation of environmental stewards, or those looking for a text to introduce biodiversity and conservation.

Recommended for all ages.



THE SECRET LANGUAGE OF BIRDS

Author: Lynne Kelly

Publisher: Delacorte Press (2024)

In The Secret Language of Birds, readers are introduced to Nina, a 13-year-old bird enthusiast who struggles to fit in and connect with others, including her own family. The author, Lynne Kelly, helps readers to understand Nina's difficulty with social situations through a powerful inner voice that is filled with worry, fear, and doubt, often ruminating about how imagined interactions with others will go.

When Nina is sent to a wilderness camp, she is thrust into a new environment filled with unfamiliar faces and new worries. The camp serves as a setting where Nina builds new relationships and learns about her worth, while also further igniting her

passion for animals and the environment.

Beyond themes of friendship and self-acceptance, the book also examines important environmental issues. As Nina spots an endangered bird species during her time at the camp, she learns about the harsh realities of nature and the impact humans have on the natural world.

The Secret Language of Birds is a great resource for teachers looking to touch on universal themes of feeling different and navigating friendships or who are looking for a read-aloud that includes topics such as endangered species and wildlife protection.

Recommended for ages 9-14.

BUILDING COMMUNITY AND STAYING CONNECTED: MY RTAM EXPERIENCE

For the past eight years, I've had the privilege of being a member of the Retired Teachers' Association of Manitoba (RTAM), and for the past two, I've served on its Board of Directors. Over the years, I've come to truly appreciate what RTAM represents: a strong, supportive community that understands the unique needs and desires of retired teachers.

Building and nurturing community is something I believe in wholeheartedly, and it's exactly what RTAM offers to retired educators. As a member of several boards of other organizations, I dedicate my time and experience to improving the lives of others and strengthening the bonds that make communities thrive. This commitment to service and connection is a core value I share with RTAM.

As both a retired teacher and a senior, I've found that RTAM offers countless opportunities to stay active, engaged, and connected with others. The association provides a wide range of seminars and programs designed to enhance life after retirement. Whether it's learning how to age gracefully, mastering money management, or exploring exciting travel opportunities, RTAM ensures that there's something for everyone. They foster an environment where we can continue to grow, learn, and connect with like-minded individuals.

RTAM also gives me the chance to meet other retirees, share experiences, and build lasting friendships. It truly is a place to belong—a community where retired teachers can continue to make meaningful contributions, stay mentally and physically active, and enjoy a fulfilling retirement.

If you're looking for a vibrant and supportive community where you can continue to grow, learn, and connect, I highly recommend joining RTAM. It's more than just an organization; it's a place where retired teachers can continue making a difference.



CONTACT RTAM

For more information about RTAM visit <https://www.rtam.mb.ca/en/> or scan the QR code.



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