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The Impact of Treaty4Project on Students and Teachers: Learning From Our Experience



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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	1
Abstract	3
Introduction	4
Community Profile	6
Background and Relevance	7
Treaty4Project	9
Hypothesis	15
Methodology	16
Findings	19
Chelsea Smith’s Story	20
Ada Harris’ Story	20
New Learning From the Conference	20
Changes in Perspective a Year Later	21
Applying Knowledge Outside of School	24
The Younger Generation’s Relationship With Treaty 4	25
First Nations University: The Importance of Learning Outside the Classroom	26
Unexpected Findings	29
Conclusion	35
References	37

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Abstract

Treaty4Project is also known as Treaty 4: The Next Generation Project. It was an educational project that allowed students to explore the idea of treaty citizenship. It helped them understand their generation's relationship with Treaty 4 in Saskatchewan, both today and in the future. Through the participation of an Elder, a Cree/Métis artist, university professors, activists, and education students, as well as through the introduction of classroom resources, the project provided students with the fundamental knowledge they needed to tackle these very complex issues.

This research study explored students' evolving understandings of themselves as treaty people after they participated in a conference aimed at unpacking ideas related to treaties. The conference explored treaty citizenship in several ways, such as by addressing treaty roles and responsibilities and by working with an Indigenous artist to create artwork inspired by related questions. The project was a learning experience for students and teachers alike, as it strove to reinforce inclusive interpretations of Saskatchewan history and help youth develop their own perspectives on treaty citizenship.

Introduction

“We are all treaty people.” That is what we tell young people. However, what does it mean to today’s generation of smartphone users and Netflix consumers who tend to channel their activism into social media? As high school French immersion teachers, we have been asking ourselves and our students this very question. We understand why treaty education is vital to students’ comprehension of the world they live in. Further, we are constantly searching for better ways to help them learn about treaties in the classroom. However, we struggled to give our students an authentic learning experience using available French-language resources.

For example, Leia completed an inquiry project with her Grade 9 French immersion students. It asked them to compare, contrast, and analyze the negotiation of treaties in Canada and other countries, especially Australia. However, by the end of the project, the students’ understanding of treaties remained purely historical and rather superficial. When they asked Leia about why they were considered treaty people and about their roles and responsibilities, she realized that although she understood the relevant historical concepts, she could only offer very simplistic answers.

Naomi faced similar challenges. After four years of creating authentic learning experiences for her Grade 12 French immersion students, she realized that although the students understood the different points of view on treaties, they rarely took the additional step of re-examining their own views on the issue. Students struggled to understand why treaties were signed between the Canadian government and First Nations people, and how the two parties interpreted the spirit and intent of the treaties in different ways.

We (Leia and Naomi) began to reflect on the situation in September 2014. At that time, teachers like us tended to be less aware of the reconciliation process because the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada had yet to release its final report. We attended professional development workshops on the importance of giving our students meaningful information on First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) history and worldviews. Everyone recognized the importance of doing so, and a few of our colleagues were already doing wonderful projects with their students that included FNMI perspectives. However, most teachers complained about the difficulty of addressing FNMI issues in a meaningful and authentic way. We were aware of the Office of the Treaty Commissioner and our division had recommended various educational resources, as well as identifying Elders and Aboriginal education consultants, who could help us use them. Still, we remained unsure of how to step out of our comfort zone and present this important information on FNMI worldviews to our students.

Our search for answers first led us to Calvin Racette, an aboriginal co-ordinator from Regina Public Schools. He was immediately interested in the project and suggested to ask for help from an Elder. That is how we met Life Speaker Noel Starblanket. Our entire Committee was formed in this manner; extraordinary individuals introduced us to other extraordinary individuals who were excited about contributing to a common project on treaties. After many discussions and much planning we launched Treaty4Project, also known as Treaty 4: The Next Generation Project. This year-long initiative included a focus on Treaty 4 and Indigenous issues in the classroom, a youth conference for 220 students from four Regina high schools, a large-scale art project undertaken in collaboration with Cree/Métis artist Ray Keighley, and an in-depth, student-driven final project. The main goal of Treaty4Project was for students to explore the idea of treaty citizenship so they could better understand their generation's relationship with Treaty 4 in Saskatchewan, both today and in the future. But, what was the result? Did the project succeed in changing our students' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities in relation to Treaty 4?

Community Profile

In present-day Saskatchewan, six treaties were negotiated between 1871 and 1877. They all specified that their terms would be governed by the *Indian Act* (Saskatchewan Education, 1997). Today, there are many misconceptions about the role of treaties in Saskatchewan. As Simpson (2011) asks, “how ... can [we] reconcile when the majority of Canadians do not understand the historic or contemporary injustice of dispossession and occupation”? (p. 21). For instance, a lot of people say that treaties are part of the past, and that we need to put them aside and move on. However, as a legal agreement, treaties remain very relevant in the present day. They need to be properly understood for everyone in Saskatchewan to live together in respect and harmony.

Regina is located in Treaty 4 territory. Also known as the Qu’Appelle Treaty, Treaty 4 was signed between the British Crown and Saulteaux leaders on September 15, 1874 (Office of the Treaty Commissioner, 2014). As a result, the Canadian government acquired all lands in southern Saskatchewan. In order to fully understand the meaning of Treaty 4 and its present-day significance, and before students can fully engage in the reconciliation process, they need to learn more about First Nations traditions, customs, values, institutions, and laws. They also need to learn more about the history of colonization and how the Canadian government orchestrated a political and cultural genocide, which included the use of residential schools to assimilate FNMI people to the mainstream Canadian culture (Daschuk, 2013; Simpson, 2011; Sterzuk, 2011; Laroque, 2016). Since 2007, mandatory instruction in Treaty education has been included in the kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum (Saskatchewan Education, 2013). Assignments and assessments in all classes should require students to incorporate their knowledge and understanding of First Nations, in accordance with the subject matter. Treaty education was expected to be incorporated into instructional practices with assistance from Elders (Pete, Schneider, & O’Reilly, 2013; Weenie, 2014; O’Reilly, Crowe, & Weenie, 2004). On the importance of Elders, Simpson (2011) explains that “We need our Elders, our languages, and our lands, along with vision, intent, commitment, community and ultimately, action” (p. 17).

The high school where our research was conducted is located on Treaty 4 territory in Regina. It offers multiple programs for students in Grades 9-12: English, French immersion, international baccalaureate, and alternative education. The student body is mainly comprised of settlers, as well as first- and second-generation immigrants. There are few First Nations or Métis students. As part of Regina Public Schools, our school has adopted a set of shared values to be applied to all aspects of programming and decision making: I belong, I want to know, I respect, and I am responsible. We are therefore committed to using culturally sensitive and appropriate curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote understanding, acceptance, and increased cultural awareness.

Background Relevance

The way people see the world is shaped by the values expressed and defended by the institutions that govern their daily lives. For example, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees equal rights to all Canadian citizens. This might lead some to believe that discrimination based on race, skin colour, religion, sex, age, and mental or physical disability is a thing of the past. Unfortunately, mass media, sports, movies, and music videos all reflect the persistence of oppression in Canadian society. It can even be seen in children's toys (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Yet, the country enjoys an international reputation for progress and equality. How can this contradiction be explained?

Building on the notion of relationship, we sought to give our students an opportunity to explore the realities of oppression on Treaty 4 territory. This included understanding their privileges and responsibilities. Because socialization is often internalized (invisible and normalized), and because privilege is often taken for granted (McIntosh, 1988; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012), situations of oppression can be difficult to identify. To understand their role as Treaty 4 citizens, students need to be able to recognize how persistently and systemically racist discourses are reproduced, and how they promote white privilege (McIntosh, 1988; Pete et al., 2013; Tupper & Cappello, 2008; Schick & St. Denis, 2005; Sterzuk, 2011). As Métis scholar Laroque (2016) explains, "If reconciliation is to mean anything, Canadians need to look at the ways that Canada has nurtured racism against Native people. This means looking at all the major institutions that make this country run" (p. 143).

To achieve these goals, we provided our students with opportunities to question their binary worldviews through a better understanding of historical and cultural context. In this way, we sought to deconstruct official discourses (Kumashiro, 2009) and analyze how white privilege is a socially constructed idea. On this issue, Laroque (2016) explains that

There needs to be an understanding of how First Nations and Métis and Inuit have lost and continue to lose their lands and resources, and the devastating impact this has had on them. There needs to be an understanding of how racism is instrumental to colonialism. And there needs to be an understanding of how Canadian society has benefited from all this. (p. 144)

The idea behind our approach was, therefore, not only to acquire new knowledge, but also to understand the social and political context surrounding students' sense of earned entitlement. We also wanted to encourage students to develop a relationship with Indigenous culture and worldviews in their daily lives (Wilson, 2001).

In order to change their outlook, students need to be able to deconstruct ideas that impede equality and social justice on Treaty 4 territory. By reflecting on normative discourses supporting white privilege, students can better analyze the inequalities of power and knowledge that result from the privilege they enjoy but likely take for granted (Laroque, 2016). Furthermore, "Claiming Indigenous knowledge in the classroom is about 'affirming the relevance of Indigenous knowledge' in the school curriculum and our daily life" (Dei in Pete et al., 2013, p. 103). As teachers, we both agree that "The longstanding philosophies and knowledge of First Nations communities must be acknowledged and reclaimed in order to disrupt and unsettle dominant discourse" (Weenie, 2014, p. 508).

Recognizing privilege in their lives allows students to question ideas that are taken for granted and to acknowledge the presence of discrimination in society. Regarding inequality, we agree with Pete (2013) on the importance of asking, "What measure of your privilege are you willing to give up in order to create a measure of equality for another?" (Pete et al., 2013, p. 108). Recognizing privilege and inequality is therefore fundamental to promoting equality and limiting the spread of prejudice and stereotypes (Kumashiro, 2009; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

Treaty4Project

That was our starting point. Our students began to notice the contradictions and they wanted to understand them better. As teachers, we were glad to see their openness toward a more complex idea of Canada. But, what else could we do? How could we create an authentic learning experience that would stay with our students for the rest of their lives? How could we indigenize our teaching to disrupt the dominant discourse (Pete et al., 2013; Weenie, 2014)? After discussing these questions with Aboriginal knowledge keepers, we decided to adopt Pete's perspective on indigenization:

Indigenizing education is about re-centering Indigenous knowledge ways in the core of our instructional practices. I view indigenizing my teaching in a holistic way. Indigenizing my teaching is about relationships, curriculum choice, anticipating and correcting racism and it's also about pedagogy. (Pete et al., 2013, p. 103)

We also agreed that "the term 'indigenization' is superficial if we do not make a conscious effort to live and experience cultural ways" (Weenie, 2014, p. 517). These were the key ideas behind Treaty4Project, which began in early September 2014 and continued through June 2015. As a whole, the project encompassed preliminary classroom teaching, our students' work with Life Speaker Noel Starblanket and Indigenous artist Ray Keighley, a two-day youth conference for our students and students from three other Regina high schools, and subsequent classroom activities.

Thus, Treaty4Project was an ambitious approach to learning about treaties. It was guided by a committee of individuals who shared our desire to create change, including Life Speaker Noel Starblanket (Starblanket Reserve), Ray Keighley (Cree/Métis Artist), Dr. Angelina Weenie and Dr. Kathleen O'Reilly (Indigenous education professors at the First Nations University of Canada and the University of Regina), Calvin Racette (co-ordinator for Aboriginal education at Regina Public Schools), Sandra Bellegarde (Aboriginal consultant at Regina Public Schools), Monique Bowes (instructional consultant at Regina Public Schools), and Hillary Ibbott-Neiszner (vice-principal at Regina Public Schools). Thanks to their tireless efforts, the project evolved into something bigger than what any of us envisioned at the outset.

The Committee decided that before students could fully engage in the conference and other activities, they would need a deeper understanding of the issues (Pete et al., 2013).

Therefore, pre-teaching focused on the following themes:

- Livelihoods, providing, hunting, and gathering.
- History of Treaty 4 negotiations.
- Ceremonies and traditions practised today.
- Traditional medicine.
- Oral tradition and storytelling.
- Identity and relationships with Treaty 4 from Cree, Nakota/Dakota, British, French-Canadian, Saulteaux, Métis, and new Canadian perspectives.
- Sovereignty and nationhood.

It was also essential for students to act as leaders themselves and have opportunities to socialize and discuss what they were learning with students from other schools. This was facilitated by our teaching team, made up of Tiffany Agopsowicz, Heather Findlay, Tana Burrows, and Tamara Smith. They organized a leadership conference where selected students from each of the four participating schools learned about the topics that would be discussed at the main youth conference. This meant that student leaders were prepared to act as facilitators at the youth conference, leading meaningful and reflective discussions with small groups of students. This helped deepen the learning of everyone involved.

The Committee also arranged for some of its members to work directly with participating students in the weeks leading up to the youth conference. Thus, all students spent two days learning about painting techniques and traditional knowledge with artist Ray Keighley. Life Speaker Noel Starblanket and Calvin Racette helped students and their classroom teachers explore the idea of treaty people more in depth.



*Ray Keighley teaching a student to mix her colours to create an effect.
Photo: Leia Laing*

The Treaty4Project youth conference was held at the First Nations University of Canada on April 28-29, 2015. A total of 220 students from four Regina public high schools took part. The goal was for students to explore the concept of treaty citizenship and gain a better understanding of their generation's relationship with Treaty 4 in Saskatchewan, both today and in the future.

On the first day of the conference (April 28), students were welcomed to the First Nations University of Canada by keynote speaker Cadmus Delorme, a First Nations University recruiter at the time who became Chief of the Cowessess First Nation in 2016. After an opening prayer from Elder Sylvie Opey and a musical performance by Brad Bellegarde (a.k.a. InfoRed), the Master of Ceremonies Sandra Bellegarde explained what the rest of the day held in store. Students could choose from a wide variety of workshops led by professors, activists, and education students from the First Nations University¹. Based on their learning experiences in the classroom and at the conference, students were asked to imagine what citizenship would ideally mean in Treaty 4 territory.



*Learning together during the two-day youth conference at First Nations University
Photo: Monique Bowes*

¹ For full conference details, please visit our blog: <http://treaty4thenextgeneration.blogspot.ca/p/2015-treaty4project-first-edition.html>

On the second day of the conference (April 29), students collaborated on a work of art with renowned artist Ray Keighley. They began the day working in family groups of between six and 10 students, with all participating schools represented in each group. The family groups discussed what they had learned in the classroom and during the previous day, as well as what Treaty 4 citizenship meant to them. Participants were then asked to illustrate their concept of treaty citizenship on a canvas tile with help from Ray Keighley. Some students chose to create their tile individually, while others chose to work as a group. Tile by tile, the project came together. A total of 256 individual pieces were used to create an image of a medicine wheel that incorporated the First Nations University of Canada and the Saskatchewan Legislative Building.



*The next generation/La prochaine génération by Ray Keighley & Regina Public Schools' students.
Photo: Leia Laing*

The completed work is shown in the picture below, depicting treaty citizenship as it was understood by 220 students from four Regina public high schools. At the end of the day, students and staff gathered to celebrate their achievements and reflect on the work that they had done.



... Our piece coming together
Photo: Monique Bowes

Titled *The Next Generation/La prochaine génération*, the work of art created by students at the Treaty4Generation youth conference was officially unveiled by artist Ray Keighley in June 2015. It was displayed at each of the participating schools before being moved to its permanent home at the Mâdawêyatîtan Centre. It will serve as an enduring symbol of this ground-breaking project that promoted a deeper understanding of Treaty 4.



The official unveiling
Photo: Monique Bowes

A week after the youth conference, participating Grade 9 students were asked to create an *album illustré* in their *Français arts langagiers* class. It would be a kind of graphic novel, based on what they had taken away from their most meaningful workshop session. Students started by writing a 400-word expository text that began with a question or problem and then explained what had happened in the past and what was happening in the present. Next, they created the graphic novel which gave them a chance to provide new information through storytelling. Finally, they wrote a persuasive paragraph that suggested solutions or made a call to action. The images illustrating the texts were then combined to complete the *album illustré*.

Hypothesis

It was important that we determine how students' perceptions changed as a result of their participation in Treaty4Project. The project sought to give students a better understanding of their generation's relationship with Treaty 4 in Saskatchewan. We believe that it achieved this goal. By leaving the classroom and listening to stories (a traditional practice in First Nations culture), students achieved a deeper awareness of their roles and responsibilities in relation to Treaty 4, as well as their ability to create a better future for their own generation and those who will follow. We hope that this new knowledge will encourage those living on Treaty 4 territory to identify as treaty citizens and that it will serve as their first step on the path to reconciliation.

Methodology

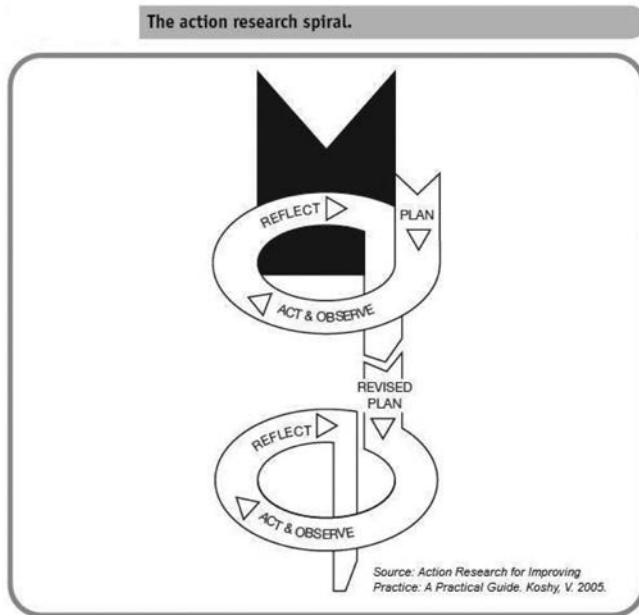
We undertook this large-scale project because our previous classroom activities had not achieved the desired effect. While the project itself proved meaningful (Efrat Efron & Ravid, 2013) for a small group of students, we also believe it had value for teachers seeking to improve how they teach about treaties in Saskatchewan. Indeed, by using a qualitative interpretive mode of inquiry for data collection, we succeeded in reflecting on and improving our own teaching practices (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).

We believe that “knowledge can be held in stories that can be relayed, stored and retrieved” (Fry, 2002). Therefore, we chose to use stories as a source of data for exploring how the students who participated in Treaty4Project experienced the world in 2015 (Clandinin, 1986; Connelly & Clandinin, 1991, 2000). In particular, this involved discovering how students’ perceptions of their relationship with Treaty 4 changed after participating in the project. Using their stories, we have been able to examine the student perspective (Riessman, 2008) as well as our own professional and personal selves by recapturing a past experience in our teaching practice (Efrat Efron & Ravid, 2013). Therefore, we refer to the stories as data (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), which is significant insofar as we see the study of narrative as a way of understanding experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Our goal is to present students’ and teachers’ experience narratively as experiential knowledge that is both personal and practical (Dewey, 1938).

This action research process aims to show how two students internalized learning after participating in Treaty4Project. We have used it to identify which parts of the learning process were meaningful for the students and their teacher (Leia). This involves listening to the students’ stories of their “lived-experiences” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) which express their perspectives and provide accounts of their experience (Clandinin, 1986). We hope that the collected stories will provide insight into teaching and deep learning that will help us and other teachers improve how we teach about treaties and Indigenous issues. We also hope to transform individual attitudes (Fals Borda, 2002) and work toward social change (Wilson, 2001) by more frequently integrating treaty-related knowledge across the curriculum.

The stories were collected from a 40-minute focus group and 20-minute individual interviews held in March 2016, from students’ work (including the *album illustré* created in June 2015), from anonymous post-conference evaluations submitted in May 2015, and from teacher journal entries.

Using action research self-reflective cycles, we have analyzed the stories through a spiral of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Each of these phases validates the previous one, while looking forward to the next one in a fluid and open process (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). Our analysis of the stories helps identify which activities were most meaningful for project participants, as well as ways that we and other educators improve how we teach about treaties and Indigenous culture in the classroom (McTaggart, 2002).



Action Research for improving Practice Credit: <http://wordpress.oise.utoronto.ca/arc/ar-cycle/>
#.VRnHS03wtMs

Participants, who were in Grade 10 at the time of the study, were selected on a voluntary basis. They were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The parents or legal guardians of all Grade 10 students who participated in Treaty4Project in the spring of 2015 received a letter explaining the research study. They were asked to sign a consent form allowing their child to participate. As their teachers, we recognize that we were personally involved with the participants at the time of the research study. To avoid exerting any pressure on potential participants, all consent forms were returned to a neutral third party (the vice-principal of our school) who selected the participants at random. Students' marks were in no way affected by their participation in the study or their refusal to participate. We have used pseudonyms to identify study participants in order to maintain confidentiality.

Our research required approval from the Regina Public Schools Board of Education and the University of Regina Research Ethics Board. Further, because we were studying students' evolving perceptions of their relationship with Treaty 4, it was important to collaborate and consult with members of the Aboriginal community as well. Quoting Ermine (2007), Weenie recommends, "focusing on community as the place of knowledge. It is a process that entails consultation and collaboration" (Weenie, 2014, p. 508). Collaborating with members of the Aboriginal community also helped hold us accountable since the study "was not just about gaining knowledge from them ... it involved coming to an agreement

about mutually understood ideas” (Wilson, 2001, pp. 178-179). Thus, we believe that “research is not just something that’s out there: it’s something that you’re building for yourself and for your community” (Wilson, 2001, p. 179).

The research study was completed under the supervision of Life Speaker Noel Starblanket, Dr. Kathleen O’Reilly and Dr. Angelina Weenie from the First Nations University of Canada, and Aboriginal Co-ordinator Calvin Racette from Regina Public Schools. They helped ensure that appropriate Indigenous protocols were respected (O’Reilly et al., 2004, p. 35). As Wilson (2003) explains, “Indigenous research is a life-changing ceremony” (p. 35); their experience and knowledge related to Indigenous research projects were also an important asset to us. After the study received approval from the University of Regina Research Ethics Board, participating teachers and other collaborators attended a pipe ceremony conducted by Life Speaker Noel Starblanket. The ceremony laid the foundation for our research, and included a call “for prayer, to acknowledge and ask for guidance from the Creator, and to give thanks for the gifts we have been given” (O’Reilly et al., p. 36).

Because our research focused on the experiences of a small group of students and their teacher, our findings cannot be generalized (Efrat Efron & Ravid, 2013). Although we would have preferred to work with a larger sample of participants, we still believe that listening to Chelsea and Ada’s stories and the reflections of their teacher has yielded useful and important results. Their perspectives reflect in-depth knowledge of the topic at the heart of our investigation. By better understanding how students make sense of their educational experiences, we can identify ways of improving how we teach about treaties and Indigenous culture, while making students better aware of privilege. The integrity of our findings rests on the triangulation of data from multiple sources: the focus group, individual interviews, the *album illustré*, anonymous post-conference, and from teacher journal entries (Efrat Efron & Ravid, 2013).

As teacher-researchers, the research study was also a personal journey for us. We learned about nêhiyaw (Cree) culture, as well as other Indigenous cultures, ceremonies, and treaties. We worked to become more aware of our own privilege and how it affects who we are, our actions, and how we think. Despite our increased awareness of our privileged status within Canadian society and our increased knowledge of Indigenous culture, we acknowledge that our own personal values and perspectives as teacher-researchers have been shaped by a colonial educational experience (Simpson, 2011). Furthermore, because meaning is connected to a person’s individual worldview, we recognize the presence of subjectivity within our research process. We have chosen to include our personal voices in the study because we believe that “personal practical experience is useful for creating new theory” (Weenie, 2014, p. 505). This approach also allowed us to disclose our ongoing desire to reflect on questions of social justice and better integrate them into our teaching practice (Weenie, 2014).

Findings

The scope of our findings, like the scope of our research project, is vast. We have organized them into six sections:

- i. New Learning from the Conference.
- ii. Changes in Perspective a Year Later.
- iii. Applying Knowledge Outside of School.
- iv. The Younger Generation's Relationship with Treaty 4.
- v. First Nations University: The Importance of Learning Outside the Classroom.
- vi. Unexpected findings.

The voices in the first section belong to many different students. Immediately following the conference, teachers from all four high schools asked their students what they had learned, what had changed for them, and what their generation's relationship should be with Treaty 4 and other treaties. A colleague created an anonymous survey using Google Forms which allowed all participating teachers to collect information on what their students found most meaningful. As educators, our intent was to use this feedback as a guide for making our classroom teaching more meaningful for students in the years to come. We consider the comments reproduced in this section to be representative of the responses received from over 200 students.

Chelsea Smith and Ada Harris tell their stories in following sections, providing a deeper understanding of students' experiences with the project.

The final section gives voice to our own experiences during Treaty4Project, as well as those of our colleagues. Although we did not ask to interview our colleagues, many of them regularly told us stories about changes they were experiencing and implementing in their classrooms. The sheer number of teachers who wanted to share their experiences was so large that we decided to add a general account to this section of what they were saying.

Chelsea Smith's Story

Chelsea was one of the youth leaders chosen to attend the leadership conference held before the main Treaty4Project youth conference. She is a high-achieving, outgoing young teenager who is involved in a variety of fine arts programs. She exudes confidence and joy in almost everything she does. Her bright, shining eyes immediately draw attention to her cheery disposition. She is open-minded and interested in socializing. Physically, Chelsea is a little shorter than the average Grade 10 student, with shoulder-length medium brown hair. She appears to be a white settler.

Ada Harris' Story

Ada is generally quiet and composed, but she remains engaged and interested in what's going on around her. Anyone who takes the time to talk with this young woman immediately recognizes that she is wise beyond her years, both in terms of academics and her understanding of local and world issues. During the interview process, we learned that her family is very involved in the protection of women and women's rights. In particular, her mother seems to regularly discuss subjects such as racism, the challenges faced by new immigrants, and First Nations issues with Ada. Physically, she is tall for a Grade 10 student, with long blond hair. She moves with poise and grace. Ada also appears to be a white settler.

New Learning From the Conference

Immediately following the youth conference, teachers from all four high schools asked their students what they had learned, what had changed for them, and what their generation's relationship should be to Treaty 4 and other treaties. The following comments are representative of those that appeared most often in the responses to the Google Forms survey.

Seeing her point of view on how she was affected by white privilege factors and to see the difference in how I am treated and how someone with another skin tone is treated was a really touching experience and a huge eye opener. (Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack)

It was a very heavy topic, but I think it was the one that left the most impact on me. (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women)

She did this imaginative exercise on what it would be like to be taken and it just really put me in the position of fear and sadness to be able to (experience) what it was like for only a second, to experience what people go through regularly and some people are still going through. (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women)

The Cree language is very beautiful and makes you feel good inside and expressing it through song made it all the more lovely. (Indigenous Knowledge)

Learning about how these families would only receive \$5 at a time and get fined \$15 really made me think. (Historical Primary Source Inquiry)

Treaties were negotiated for 6 days more or less, and a decision had been made. Very fast decision-making. (Treaty 4 Role Play)

That there are different ways to paint and different symbols to represent Saskatchewan or Treaty 4. (Art with Ray)

Changes in Perspective a Year Later

Almost a year after the youth conference, both Ada and Chelsea could still clearly recall many details about the event and talk about what mattered most to them. Direct learning through storytelling seemed to have had the greatest impact on Ada. She remembered all the facts and ideas that classroom teachers would hope for their students to retain. What is more, although she did not use the words “change” or “perspective,” Ada had clearly begun to look at her world differently:

I know, especially the Invisible Knapsack, the one thing that stuck with me, and I don't know why, it's that they mentioned like representation in the media ... not just of Aboriginal people but of all people of colour and it's something that I've really started noticing a lot more recently like in TV shows and movies and it's just ... it's really a shame because you don't really see ... it's a lot of white people on TV. (Ada, interview)

For her part, Chelsea felt a responsibility to tell her story since she was a student leader who had attended the leadership conference before the main youth conference. She felt that she had gained more insight because of her higher level of involvement. She too had learned a great deal from listening to the stories of the presenters at the conference, as well as in the classroom beforehand. The importance of learning the truth about Indigenous history had been especially meaningful for her in her Grade 9 year:

Well like in Grade 8, we talked a lot about residential schools and even in Grade 7 and going into Grade 9 as well. But because we were in elementary, they kind of sugar-coated it because we're still children in their eyes. So when we got into Grade 9, it felt more like we were discussing it more, and not as like ... as children, we were discussing it more like adults who were discussing the real problems, and what was actually happening and how it affected so many people. So it felt more highlighted in a way rather than kind of that sugar-coated version. (Chelsea, focus group)

As for the classroom activities related to the conference, Ada recalled the final project, creating an *album illustré*, without any prompting. She remembered which subject she had chosen, what the issues were, and how she was at a total loss when asked to write the third text proposing solutions or making a call to action:

Yeah, this one I actually... [She holds her album illustré in her hands.] ... I was really interested in it. Here again, it was the missing and murdered Aboriginal women, and I believe it may be in part because my mom was there. So I had those resources. I had a chance to ask her questions, because she works with abused women and she works a bit with the police talking about it. But it really helped me. And the other thing is how there are so many factors involved and why this is going on. And it can be almost overwhelming like actually I'm not sure if it's here, but the one where we had to offer solutions about how this could be prevented. And it was really difficult to figure it out. And it helped me see how many people like how much of the community we need to inform and how much work needs to be done to really make a huge change like this. And it's a horrible thing that's going on. And there are so many... Like the treaties are important, the residential schools have left giant impacts on the population. There is so much, it's almost overwhelming but I noticed like it's not a one-fix issue. It needs to be ongoing and it needs to be focused and there needs to be a lot people involved. (Ada, interview)

At one point during her interview, Chelsea shared a difficult story of introspection. She described what seemed to be a significant change in her behaviour and her perspective since she had started discussing Indigenous issues in class and at the conference:

And you know, going to an elementary school where the majority of people were ... appeared white, [...] when they made a racist comment or something, we did not really know that we were offending anybody because there wasn't anyone there to say you know ... "that's kind of rude guys, like maybe you shouldn't say that" [...] I started realizing more how ... like in elementary school, we were being very rude, and we did not know we were being very rude [...] I think we subconsciously knew it was wrong, but we were never really told can you stop that, because there wasn't anyone being offended [...] I definitely noticed how after those discussions that it really shed a light on how what we say is very wrong a lot of the times ... and how we really need to change. And I did notice that my friends who also took part in the project, after that I noticed that they kind of noticed the same thing [...] (Chelsea, interview)

Chelsea's comment refers to the "hidden" or ingrained side of racism in Canadian society, one that many people are not aware of unless they are made to be aware of it. She continued by reflecting on how hearing the message stated explicitly and then having it reinforced by others at the conference was one of the things that made her step back and question what her peers would say:

I guess just to sum it up, it would be that I did not notice how these jokes were wrong until the conference... Until we actually worked in the class, even before the conference. I didn't know that what some of the things my friends would say were wrong until you know we were told it's not right to do that. (Chelsea, interview)

When asked directly about the changes she had experienced, Ada saw the change in her perspective as being more cerebral. She had gained so much new information that helped her broaden her understanding of many complex issues:

I think the biggest change I experienced before the conference was when we were doing research. I believe it was focused around the residential school. Right? It's just how little I actually knew about them. Again, I talked about this a bit last time. But, how we kind of felt like we had an idea of what went on during residential schools and just realizing just how limited our knowledge was [...] But tuberculosis and all that was completely new to me. So I think it's just opened my eyes to see that you know there really was a lot more to learn about that. (Ada, interview)

And then I think the one that I might have learned the most on was the Métis experience which I had very little knowledge on ... I know what the Métis people are, but I am kind of not exactly sure what I had expected happened, because I knew that they did go to residential schools, but it turns out that they did not really go to schools at all ... they were kind of ignored. Oftentimes, their identity, just the legal aspects of it ... about how you could identify like non-status Indian and all that kind of things. About how the government can decide upon your identity and they could take away your rights like that ... I was shocked: I had no idea about all those kind of things. So I think that was the one I learned the most about. (Ada, interview)

Applying Knowledge Outside of School

Ada and Chelsea both talked about how the things they had learned the previous year, in the classroom, and especially at the youth conference had affected how they saw themselves and their world. One very personal story shared by Chelsea appeared especially significant. She seemed to have internalized what she had learned at the conference. The experience was helping her identify what she had already observed in the world but had not been able to name: white privilege.

[...] when we brought the attention to the white privilege, I then realized how it also affected my family. [...] I noticed how because [my dad] wasn't white, how we were now affected negatively and I had not recognized it before until I heard the definition of white privilege. And again after hearing that, I saw how it affected other people who didn't have white privilege. (Chelsea, focus group)

Chelsea talked about how she had always seen herself as mixed race. However, the conference session on Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack made her realize that because of the colour of her skin, she benefits from white privilege. Further, she has experienced its effects first-hand in her own family. During the focus group, Chelsea shared the details of her family's story, describing how they had observed white privilege time and time again. This reminded Chelsea of her final Treaty4Project activity, the *album illustré*. However, Chelsea admitted that she could not quite remember everything she had done the previous year. She asked to see the album illustré again before her individual interview.

When Chelsea was in Grade 9, Leia asked her if she could talk about white privilege in her *album illustré*, putting her own personal twist on the story. Chelsea's parents are a mixed-race couple, but Chelsea appears white. She identifies with both cultures and had never thought about white privilege and how it might affect her and her family. During the focus group, Chelsea shared that same story with us, but in more detail. Leia recalls how Chelsea would bring up the subject from time to time, after she first told her story in class. She seemed to have internalized what she had learned at the youth conference, which had a deep, personal impact on how she understands the world. The knowledge she gained seems to have genuinely transformed her understanding of the world. She had a sort of breakthrough in understanding the perspective of others, something she will never be able to control. This appears to have made her more aware of white privilege in the world.

You may not think you have white privilege but you do. I know that was a thing I struggled with. [...] I have a different racial background. So I thought well maybe I am not as white privileged but my appearance says otherwise. And I am... I do look white and I did not notice that until after we brought the attention to the white privilege. I had noticed OK I do have white privilege. [...] I have noticed how people are treated badly because they're not white. And I thought recognizing that I was that helped me understand how it affects other people. (Chelsea, focus group)

The Younger Generation's Relationship With Treaty 4

The students were directly asked about their generation's relationship with Treaty 4. This is a difficult question to address, even for adults who actively work toward improving treaty relations. Nevertheless, the students' answers reflect a great degree of personal reflection and insight.

On the second day of the youth conference, participants collaborated on a work of art. In order to encourage them to discuss what they had learned the previous day, students from different schools were teamed up in "family groups." For Chelsea, working collaboratively with her family group was directly linked to her generation's relationship with Treaty 4:

I think that after Treaty 4, a lot of my friends whom I was talking to about it after said that after the project, we felt that we were all kind of all together in a way, like a bigger sense of community and like equality especially in the [family] group. [...] And I think that is the biggest thing my generation could do is just keep this sense of equality through our life because if we can keep that amongst our generation, the next generation can follow suit and so forth. (Chelsea, interview)

Chelsea also warned of the dangers of apathy among members of her generation:

So I noticed a lot of that and even going to high school, [...] if there are just people who think this doesn't affect me, so I'm just not going to do it, I'm not going to participate. And I know this is a problem that will continue especially now in our generation. I noticed that everywhere I go if it doesn't affect me, like who cares. So I think with the Treaty 4 like, bringing attention to that yeah maybe it won't affect you, but you know, you might run into someone one day who is affected by it. And what are you gonna do then when you have no clue, because you don't care to learn about it. (Chelsea, focus group)

Nevertheless, she seemed to remain optimistic:

I found that after the conference, because I learned about how to be equal with people on a better level. Because I know how to be equal with people, but I didn't fully understand it. And in that way, the project really helped me understand the sense of equality and unity and I think that is a really important thing to learn for our generation, because when we grow older, like it's gonna be very important to be equal because racism is a thing that in this age is still a problem but it shouldn't be. So if our generation could learn to be equal, then, in the future that will help end racism, in my opinion. (Chelsea, focus group)

In her comments, Ada focused on her generation's role in education, both learning and teaching:

Well I think a big thing is education, education now. Learning about these things and learning about the problems and the solutions, and the positives and the negatives and all that really helps. And just be really informed about what's going on. But also, I believe was it at the university where they write these letters to the Prime Minister? [A reference to the Have a Heart Campaign.] Yes, I remember that really vividly about how just on reserves they were given thousands less and thousands and thousands and thousands less than non-reserve people and how even at a young age you can be at such a big disadvantage. So, I think that really needs to change, because it's not impossible, but it's very, very hard to experience the same opportunities, when you're not [...] given the same opportunities. And education is really important to that, I think. And building ... building relationships, talking about this kind of thing, because it's uncomfortable and often there are some very negative things that have gone wrong because of this. So people tend not to talk about it, because they are ashamed of what has happened, and we should be, but that does not give us a right to just ignore it. It means we need to talk about it more than ever, to find some real change... (Ada, interview)

First Nations University: The Importance of Learning Outside the Classroom

The youth conference was a pivotal moment in Treaty4Project, and it left a lasting impression. A year later, Ada was able to vividly describe the presentations and the new information she learned there. Her account suggested that the stories would have lacked authenticity had they not been told by the storytellers present at the conference, or if they had all been told by a single storyteller in the classroom. Her recollections suggest that the perspective of the storyteller is as important as the story itself:

... after that, I think I had Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women. Which I knew quite a bit of facts about. It wasn't really so much focused on facts but stories, and it was very personal, and it was very ... it was really shocking. It was ... like imagine this were happening to you. That was very personal. I know I have been to a few vigils for that kind of stuff, so I feel like that was the one I was most prepared for. But again it was a different perspective and it was not so much focused on news stories or whatever, it was focused on the experiences of those who have experienced and almost been murdered and those families who have had people who have been murdered. ... so, it was pretty intense. (Ada, interview)

For Ada, leaving the classroom behind was necessary to spark the students' curiosity and to make room for differing opinions and new perspectives. During the focus group, she commented on the difference between the youth conference experience and the classroom experience:

Clearing the Plains, which was about history and stuff of Aboriginal people ... And what I liked about it is that, in our schools, often like I have been in Aboriginal Ed. all through elementary and everything. And even now, Aboriginal history and Canadian history are seen as very separate. Like, in Grade 11 and Grade 12, you can choose Canadian studies or Native studies. It's not together. (Ada, focus group)

For Ada, getting out of the classroom and visiting the First Nations University of Canada, where she helped create a work of art with artist Ray Keighley, was key to the entire experience. Thus, she explained how being in a new space with over 220 other students made collaborating on an art project a profound and symbolic experience:

I believe that that [the second day, when we collaborated on the art project] was the one that for me I felt identified the most with the treaties. Because there was a lot of people from all over the city with different backgrounds and stuff collaborating to make this one big thing that represented the treaties for them. So I think out of everything, visually it was really interesting because it was all these things that made this one giant thing. [...] I felt very connected to what had been going on at that point. (Ada, interview)

These feelings were also shared by Chelsea. For her, collaborating on a work of art was the best and most memorable part of the entire project:

I really liked the artwork we did. I took the art session and I remember we all had tiles, and the tiles then made an even bigger art project and that was my favourite. I took a lot like I thought our project meant something more so it was more enjoyable for me as an artistic person. That not only interested me and then knowing the back like the idea behind the huge artwork. That was also interesting for me. So that was my favourite part. (Chelsea, focus group)

Another important moment, especially for Chelsea, was the leadership conference she attended before participating in the main youth conference. Although she was hesitant at first:

[...] after the experience, I was so thankful I did it. It was so fun. I was so nervous it was going to be you know, stuck in a classroom with so a bunch of people I don't know. It's going to be such a long day. But it was so fun. The teachers there made it so easy to just get engaged and they made the learning process so fun. So I wanted to learn more because I was having a good time right. So, that whole day was a very good time. I felt ... After that, I felt I was extremely ready to take on the Treaty4Project conference. Yeah, the youth conference was like this everything was a very, very fun and educational thing. (Chelsea, focus group)

At one point, Chelsea provided us with tremendous insight into why getting out of the classroom and visiting the First Nations University of Canada was so important. She explained how before Grade 9 she and many of her peers often lacked interest in the First Nations' experience:

There wasn't a very high Aboriginal population at my [previous elementary] school, so I came from an opposite situation where we weren't really learning about [Indigenous culture, treaties, and white privilege], and if we were, it was kind of, I don't want to be offensive, but it was kind of repetitive [...] it would drag on forever. (Chelsea, interview)

Chelsea's level of interest in Indigenous culture seemed to change dramatically after her year-long participation in Treaty4Project. Having previously complained about endless repetition, she now described a desire to seek out even more information on Indigenous issues:

I find that the year-long process was really a good way to learn about all the subjects of Aboriginals [...] I felt like I didn't learn about other treaties and it was just Treaty 4. And I feel like I'd be more interested to know how the other treaties were formed as well [...] So it was good because I was learning new things. I wasn't repeating things I had done in Grade 8 or if I was repeating things, it was a new way and it was different and it was more interesting. (Chelsea, focus group)

Ada's answers to our questions reflected a genuine interest in treaty citizenship. A nagging question she ultimately asked to Life Speaker Noel Starblanket, who attended the focus group and the interviews, highlights her commitment to lifelong learning:

I had this question ... I've had this question for a really long time and I'm not ... When the treaties are signed, I know it's between Aboriginal people and the white people and ... with the white people on behalf of the government ... or. [...] I know I was thinking like if I were an immigrant, a non-European immigrant to Canada, I know that we are all treaty people. When you move to Canada ... when you get citizenship, are you agreeing to the treaties? (Ada, interview)

This was how Life Speaker Noel Starblanket responded:

Yes. When you become a citizen, you share all the resources that came from the land, and by sharing all the resources, you become a beneficiary of the treaty [...] But that's when people come into Canada or when ordinary Canadian citizens say I'm a treaty person, it means, I'm sharing the resources of the land. And that's how you become a treaty person. And you have the benefits of the treaty. (Life Speaker Noel Starblanket during Ada's interview)

Ada clearly appreciated his explanation:

I would say that I've noticed that before and so I would say that it has helped a lot with my identity towards the treaties. But yeah, I feel like there needs to be more to educate people on treaties. (Ada, interview)

Unexpected Findings

Initially, we intended to share both our voices in this research study. However, as the study unfolded Naomi began to make interesting observations of Leia teaching her Grade 10 students. They had participated in Treaty4Project the previous year and were now taking other courses with her. Naomi had participated in the project with Grade 12 students who had since graduated.

The following year, since the first Treaty4Project youth conference (which was held in 2015), Leia continues to conduct action research with her students, constantly going through the self-reflective cycles of planning, action, observations, and reflection (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). Through this process (Weenie, 2014), she has begun to draw some conclusions based on observations made in her own classroom and elsewhere in the school. Many of our colleagues have shared stories of how they have incorporated treaties, First Nations knowledge and traditions, stories, and other aspects of the project in their own classrooms. In part, this reflects a shared goal set by our school community to focus on FNMI achievement. But, other teachers often singled out Leia, inviting her into their

classrooms or stopping her in the hallway or in the staffroom over lunch to share how they were changing their teaching practices:

- Teacher A taught his students how to make traditional bentwood in his construction/woodworking class.
- Teacher B invited a special guest to teach a Cree song to the school choir. The choir performed the song numerous times for parents and for the staff of other schools in our division. Students also gave a performance at the First Nations University of Canada. As a core leader, Teacher B also encouraged the other teachers in her core to seek out similar opportunities in the classroom and at professional development events. For instance, she organized a professional development day at the First Nations University of Canada where teachers could learn how to authentically incorporate Indigenous teachings into their individual subject areas.
- Teacher C invited an Elder to visit her classroom and asked us how to present tobacco to an Elder.
- Teacher D became more willing to share what she had long been doing in her social studies class to incorporate Indigenous knowledge organically, rather than as a separate topic.
- Teacher E had previously engaged her students in learning about traditional Indigenous games. But, now she sent out an email inviting other school staff to watch and even participate in the games. She also encouraged anyone who was interested in playing the games with their own students to ask her for information on traditional games or conduct research on their own.
- Teacher F was an active member of the Treaty4Project Planning Committee. This year, she created and shared new French resources to help students better understand the signing of treaties and their significance. She also invited her students to attend the 2016 youth conference and she coordinated the publication of an eBook that reflected the students' learning and experiences during the conference.
- Teacher G mobilized a group of colleagues to request an Aboriginal advocate for our school.

In 2016, two years after the first youth conference, school administrators organized a Truth and Reconciliation conference for staff, with the assistance of the school board. The two students involved in this research study helped facilitate a session on talking publicly about their experiences and the importance of Treaty education. Treaty4Project seems to have been a catalyst for the changes we have observed in our school.

When Leia returned to the classroom, her students, who were now in Grade 10, created an *album illustré* based on their favourite conference workshop or presentation. Leia remembers being struck by the results of their learning:

While correcting and reading through their texts, I was blown away by the quality of their writing. The students had written numerous texts on different subjects, but the voice behind these texts was so much more present than in their previous work. The other part that really jumped out for me was the message I inferred from, I'd say, more than half of the texts. In many of the texts, the students started

by explaining the presentation or the issue at hand, and often wrote a comment such as “I’d always thought ...” or “Before it seemed ...” or even “A lot of people think ...” They followed this thought by the word “but ...” and then proceeded to explain the situation as they now understood it. When I read their writing, I felt a shift or a change in their perspective. I sensed a questioning they were starting to wonder about. I could sense the prejudices that they had never before questioned or they had just realized were prejudices, examples of racism or simply ignorance. They followed up with explanations of what the real issues are. I was impressed with the level of their thinking. They did not regurgitate what they’d heard at the conference, but rather applied it to their own knowledge, analyzed it and were able to explain their new learning. (Leia journal entry, 2016)

The following entries from Leia’s journal explain what she thinks are the most important things her students need to understand about Treaty 4:

Our school is very multicultural, with Canadian and international students from around the globe. That being said, there are very few students who self-declare as Indigenous. I get the impression that students at our school are sheltered from some of the more difficult realities of our community. They seem to have some knowledge about the traditional lifestyles of First Nations people, but they don’t necessarily recognize the fact that the effects of colonisation are still apparent today. They have trouble seeing the links between the past and the present. They also don’t seem to have a sense of how real the issues facing a lot of Indigenous people are, and what’s more, they don’t always recognize how close to home those issues really are.” (Leia journal entry, 2016)

One of our presenters spoke about indigenizing public spaces. Some of the students who attended that presentation told me that they had never considered what it would be like to not have your culture present or valued in most public spaces. (Leia journal entry, 2016)

When a language and culture are presented more often and in a positive light, they become “normalized.” In other words, society tends to become more accepting of that culture’s place within the larger culture. When you look around, *nêhiyaw* (Cree) culture is not very present in our school and city. There are few public medicine wheels and few Métis flags or Treaty 4 flags on display, especially when compared to the number of Canadian or Saskatchewan (or Saskatchewan Roughrider) flags. Pride in other cultures is shown in a variety of ways, including commemorative licence plates and the occasional or everyday use of traditional clothing or symbols. However, Saskatchewan has not issued commemorative licence plates with Treaty 4 symbols and you do not see many people wearing traditional braids. Unless you actively look for these symbols in our city and especially in our school, they are not easily identifiable (Weenie, 2014; Pete et al., 2013).

Leia was able to evaluate her students' opinions on First Nations people, culture, and issues in the year following their participation in Treaty4Project. In 2016, she began working with a group of teachers to organize another Treaty 4 youth conference. During the planning stages, they decided to have students create artwork that would be given to conference speakers as a thank you. As an art teacher, Leia offered to enlist one of her classes, which was made up entirely of students who had participated in Treaty4Project in 2015. She had hoped they would be excited about coming full circle and being able to "pass it forward" by supporting the new conference while expressing thanks and recognition to people who had so generously given their time to speak at the previous conference:

When I first proposed the idea to my class, I was excited, but they were not. As soon as they saw my first handout, their reactions, generally speaking, were "Not again ..." and "Oh no, are we going to do more Treaty 4 stuff?" My heart sank. My mind raced back to when I read their final projects, the *album illustré* where they explained an issue facing Indigenous people, told a personal story, and proposed solutions. I thought of how I had seen such change in their way of thinking. I remember them admitting that they were suddenly aware of apparent and more subtle racism that they saw in their everyday lives and how unjust they found it to be. I remember rereading so many of their projects because I could pinpoint the exact moment when they explained that these issues shouldn't be allowed to continue, and one year later, their first reaction is that they are yet again forced to talk about treaties. (Leia journal entry, 2016)

How can we explain the reaction of Leia's students a year after they participated in Treaty4Project? After everything they had learned and experienced the previous year, Leia had trouble believing that her students' perspectives were defined by the same indifference they have shown at the beginning of Grade 9. Had their learning experience during Grade 9 truly been sincere and authentic? Could the initial reaction of her Grade 10 students explain why it was proving difficult to find more participants for this research study?

In order to encourage her students, Leia asked them to write down the four workshops they had attended at the youth conference and to choose their favourite. Unfortunately, many of them could not remember more than one workshop. However, when she asked them what had been most meaningful about the one workshop they could recall, all of her students were able to come up with something they had learned and explain how that knowledge had affected them. As the discussion continued and the students talked about what they remembered from the conference presentations, they slowly became more animated. They started to genuinely enjoy the discussion. When Leia asked them to think about one presenter and give reasons why they were thankful or grateful for the time that person had put into their presentation, the students had no trouble coming up with ideas. Next, she challenged them to reflect on the Seven Sacred Animals that artist Ray Keighley had introduced them to at Treaty4Project. She asked her students to think about which characteristics best represented their favourite presenter and themselves. In response, the students shared their choices and explained their reasoning with ease and careful thought:

I am writing this one week after I first proposed the idea to the students. They are all eager to offer their art as a gift to one of the presenters and they are all happy to be working on such a project. Thinking back to last year, I met this kind of resistance at the beginning of the year when the group was in Grade 9. As soon as I announced that we were going to study a novel written from *Sitting Bull's* perspective, the class's reaction was that they've talked about "all that" too often and they are sick and tired and didn't want to anymore. It took me weeks—the entire year in the case of some students—to convince them that it was important to learn about First Nations culture and to understand the negotiation of treaties. One of the reasons we'd initiated Treaty4Project was to fight back against this type of deliberate ignorance. Although the students in my art class had been against the idea initially, they very quickly changed their minds once they started genuinely thinking about what they had done and the effect it had on their lives. Their initial reaction seemed to be against the word "treaty" or Treaty4Project. But once they got past that initial reaction, they adopted a positive attitude. I can't help but wonder, if the word "treaty" elicits such a strong immediate reaction from informed youth, then how is it being perceived in our society? And how do we reclaim the word? My students quickly moved to a point of understanding and appreciation for the information they were being given. But why wasn't it immediate, and when did "treaty" become such a strong, negative word? (Leia, journal entry, 2016)

Leia's journal entry reveals an uncomfortable truth related to the presence of systemic racist discourses in our society (McIntosh, 1988; Pete et al., 2013; Tupper & Cappello, 2008; Schick & St. Denis, 2005; Sterzuk, 2011; Laroque, 2016). The resistance shown by students a year after experiencing Treaty4Project might reflect how the official discourse of equality allows them to take their privilege for granted (McIntosh, 1988; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). The internalization of white privilege seems to be very well embedded in our students' minds. Ignorance can explain why society is reproducing systemic racism (Pete et al., 2013); however, how could our well-informed Grade 10 students still be contributing to this kind of discourse? How can we overcome the reality of resistance? What is our role as teachers? Chelsea and Ada believe it is important to encourage teachers to engage their students in conversations that are deemed "difficult to hear" (Laroque, 2016; Pete et al., 2013; Simpson, 2011, Weenie, 2014). Most interestingly, through our discussions with Chelsea and Ada, we discovered that information that was difficult for them to hear often stayed with them the longest and elicited the strongest emotional responses. They also expressed a desire to learn more about the negotiations behind all treaties and the absence of treaties in the eastern provinces and British Columbia. Both of them showed an interest in discussions on acceptable behaviour, stereotypes, and white privilege.

As teachers, we used to think that our role was to present neutral information in order to help our students form their own opinions. However, after working on Treaty4Project, we both realized that knowledge is not neutral (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). As much as we believe in the importance of remaining objective, we also recognize that we have a

responsibility to acknowledge the injustices in our society. Treating some ideas as objective truths would be detrimental to our students because it would normalize “common sense” ideas and prevent them from asking critical questions (Kumashiro, 2009).

We believe that students need to understand that they are not just individuals, but are also part of a world where their actions have consequences for others. Therefore, the important thing is to understand that respect for human dignity involves taking concrete actions. It is not enough to say that you agree. You must demonstrate your commitment in ways that support fairness and equity. As Simpson (2011) explains:

For reconciliation to be meaningful to Indigenous people and for it to be a decolonizing force, it must be interpreted broadly. To me, reconciliation must be grounded in cultural generation and political resurgence. It must support Indigenous nations in regenerating our languages, our oral cultures, our traditions of governance and everything else residential schools attacked and attempted to obliterate. Reconciliation must move beyond individual abuse to come to mean a collective re-balancing of the playing field ... Reconciliation is a process of regeneration that will take many years to accomplish. (Simpson, 2011, p. 22)

Before we can affect change, we need to acknowledge our own privilege and come to terms with it on a personal level. While doing so can be uncomfortable, it allows us to engage in discussions that can change how we see our society. Integrating more diverse experiences and perspectives into our teaching practice may have increased our students’ empathy with and knowledge of different groups. However, it has not necessarily changed how they see or think about themselves. This could explain why our students can provide the correct answers to questions about treaties in Saskatchewan when they write a test. But, it also explains why their actions are not necessarily aligned with their knowledge and why they do not necessarily put what they have learned into practice. Treaty4Project gave us an opportunity to raise important questions about the political implications of everyday thoughts and actions, and “engage in a decolonization project and a re-education project that would enable ... [our students] to engage with Indigenous Peoples in a just and honorable way in the future” (Simpson, 2011, p. 23).

Conclusion

In 2014, we saw a need to talk about treaties in a different way. Treaty4Project aimed to help students discover their generation's relationship with Treaty 4 in Saskatchewan. As teachers, it was amazing to see their passion and excitement as they went from presentation to presentation, and as they worked individually or within a family group to find a way of using art to illustrate what they had learned. Therefore, we believe that the lived experience of Treaty4Project allowed students to achieve a deeper understanding of their roles and responsibilities in relation to Treaty 4.

Our research study primarily focused on the reflections of two students who actively participated in the project, as well as the reflections of their teacher. It was vital for us to discover how students' perceptions of their relationship with Treaty 4 changed after participating in Treaty4Project. The results of our research show that participating students were able to create deeper meaning and gain better knowledge regarding their roles and responsibilities in relation to Treaty 4. Furthermore, their experiences can serve as a starting point for a reflection on how to create a better future for both their own generation and those that will follow.

We understand that it was challenging to hear some of the stories. However, we are thankful for our students' willingness to be open and share what they learned. Treaty4Project allowed them to become better informed, and their new knowledge and understanding can help them affect change and create more awareness of issues related to inclusion. Therefore, we see the participants' stories as their first step on the path of reconciliation.

Through the self-reflective cycles of our action research methodology, we may have discovered another impact of the art project undertaken at the youth conference. Other teachers who worked with us during this project seem to be discussing Indigenous learning more openly and more often, as well as seeking out more authentic ways of talking about treaties and First Nations culture in the classroom. A number of other factors may have influenced this change. Firstly, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission presented its final report in December 2015. The report included 94 calls to action, and our school board has been actively seeking out ways that teachers and staff to find can respond to them in their schools and classrooms. Secondly, we should recognize that there are teachers at our school who have always discussed treaties and Indigenous culture and treaties with their students. This is also true of staff at other schools, especially ones where teachers have worked closely with Aboriginal advocates. This is a possibility that had not been discussed at our own school. At the division level, only a handful of teachers have shared their stories

with colleagues from other schools. However, we believe that by undertaking a large-scale project aimed at increasing knowledge and awareness of treaties, Indigenous issues, and privilege, the impact of our work has been felt well beyond those who participated directly in the research study. In particular, the youth conference was a highly publicized event that required collaboration between four different high schools. Because we have shared knowledge and resources on such a large scale, our colleagues have begun to seek us out to tell us what they are doing in their classrooms and to ask questions like “How do you present tobacco?” or “How do I invite an Elder into my classroom?” We believe that these teachers are choosing to share their stories and needs with us, as well as other colleagues, because they were indirectly affected by Treaty4Project.

First and foremost, Treaty4Project reflected our belief that the world of the future can be better than the society we live in today, and that the project could help inspire us, our students, and our colleagues to improve our understanding of treaties and other Indigenous issues. It was also an opportunity to collaborate with several extraordinary people who served as our mentors over the course of the project. It was an opportunity for both students and teachers to engage in learning about Indigenous issues in a practical way. We sincerely hope that Treaty4Project allowed all participants to imagine a better world and to actively work toward creating the province in which we want to live.

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