A photograph of a person standing in a forest of tall, thin trees. The person is wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a fringed, brown garment draped over their shoulders. The forest floor is covered in moss and fallen leaves. The lighting is soft, suggesting a dappled sunlight effect.

Nuts'a'maat: Strengthening Relationships, Reciprocity, & Reconciliation in Education

YFNED Conference 2026
Len Pierre, CEO



1

The Role of Reconciliation in Canadian Education

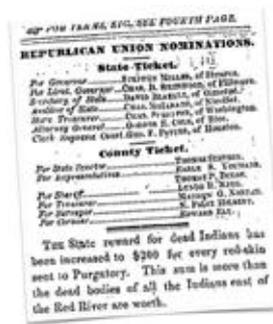
A photograph of a person, likely of Indigenous descent, sitting in a forest. They are wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat and a patterned shawl or poncho. The person is looking upwards and to the right. The background is a dense forest with tall trees.

“A bird doesn't sing because it has
an answer. It sings because it has a
song..”

-Maya Angelou



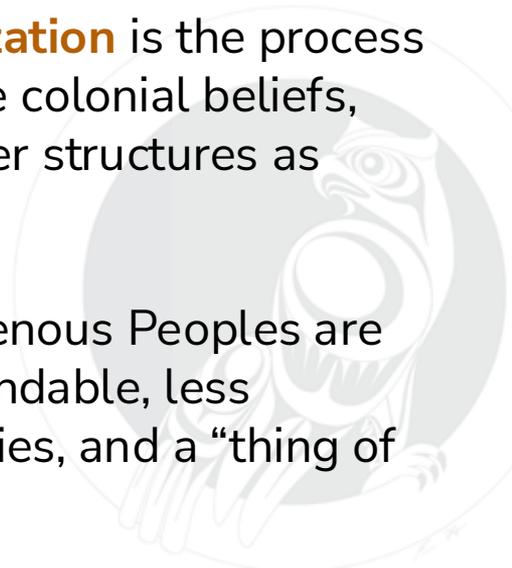
Colonial Socialization



Colonial Socialization is the process of learning to see colonial beliefs, values, and power structures as “normal”.

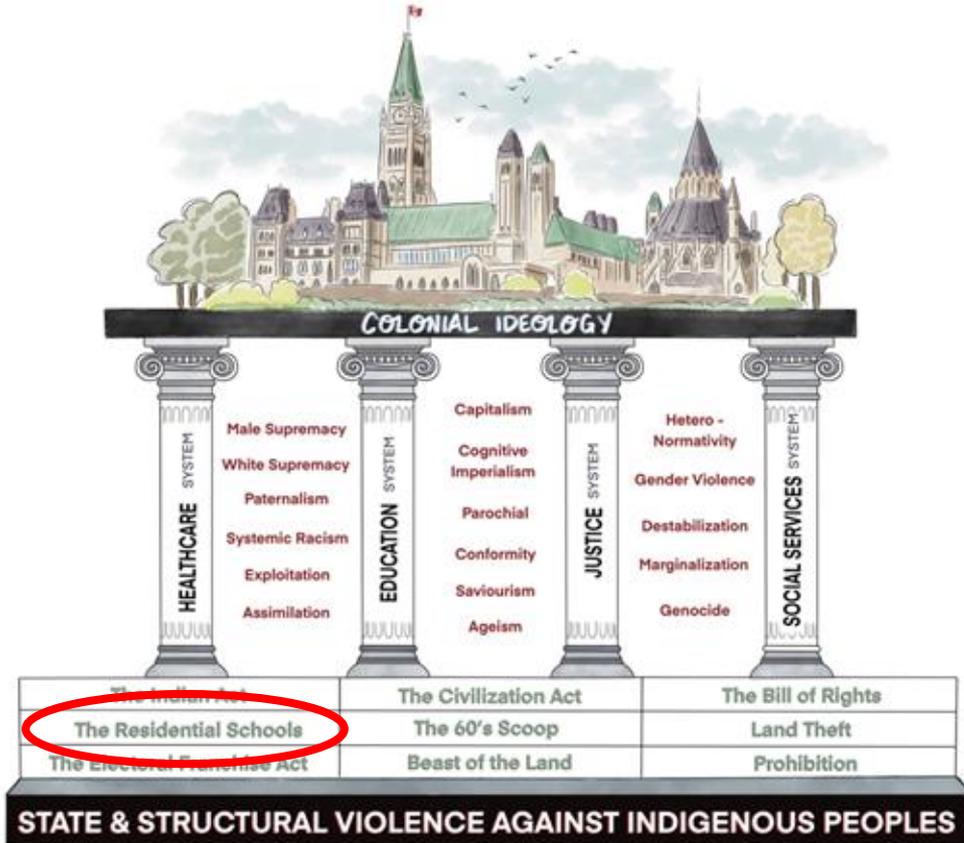


Examples: Indigenous Peoples are dangerous, expendable, less intelligent, enemies, and a “thing of the past”.





The Missing “Why” in Reconciliation and Indigenous Education



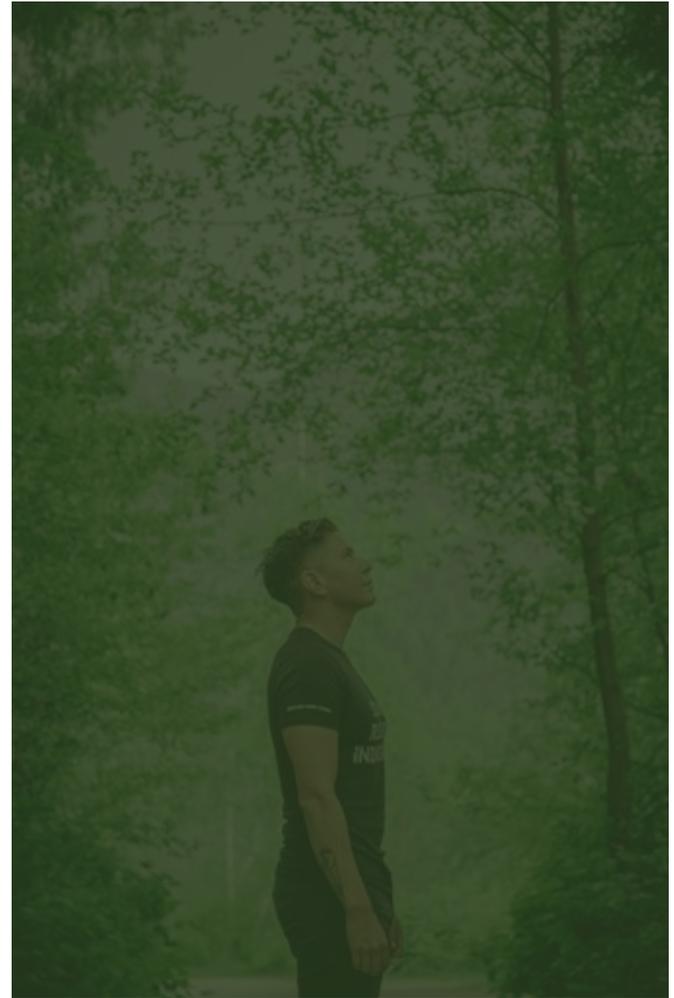
The Impact on Indigenous Learners:

- 61% FN students complete high school <91% mainstream students
- 46% if you live on-reserve
- Colonial policies decimated the intergenerational transfer of knowledge
- Nations face systemic barriers such as remote location, under-resourced schools, staff turnover, and lack of infrastructure

(Statistics Canada 2023)

2

Strengthening Relationships in Indigenous Education





Cultural Safety Spectrum

Cultural Avoidance

Cultural Awareness

Cultural Sensitivity

Cultural Safety

Cultural Advocacy



Superiority

Apathy

Dominating

Saviourism

Censoring

Remaining Silent

Limiting

Exploiting

Consuming

Aggressive

Violent

Humbleness

Humility

Compassion

Empowering

Allyship

Speaking Up

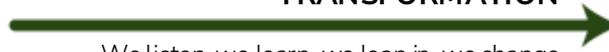
Asking Questions

Sharing

Attend To

Vulnerability

TRANSFORMATION



We listen, we learn, we lean in, we change.

SUPPORTING THE TYRANNY OF EFFICIENCY



Productivity, efficiency, data, hierarchical, time, etc.



Trauma-Informed Professional Practice

Trauma-Informed Professional Practice is a **strengths-based & truths-based** framework grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma.

It emphasises physical, psychological, emotional, and **cultural safety** for everyone, and creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and **empowerment**.





Going Beyond “Trauma-Informed”

Trauma-informed

Recognizes Indigenous targeted trauma and creates an environments that prioritize holistic safety for Indigenous Peoples.

Equity-informed

Acknowledges systemic barriers and works to redistribute power, access, and opportunity so all people can participate.

Dignity-informed

Centers person's inherent worth to uphold respect, autonomy, and reduce shame, honour boundaries, and strengthen trust.





The Opposite of Trauma is Not Healing. The Opposite of Trauma is Power.



FIGHT

Defend, confront,
and protect.



FLIGHT

Escape, avoid
and move away.



FREEZE

Shut down,
immobilize and pause.



FLOP

Collapse, submit,
and bow down.



FRIEND / FAWN

Appease, please,
and seek safety through
others.

As trauma-informed educators, our role is to see all behaviour as a form of communication.

Our job is to ask ourselves: **“What is the behaviour communicating to me?”**





Trauma Responses

RESPONSE	CHILD/YOUTH	ADULT/WORK
----------	-------------	------------



- Kicking, hitting, yelling

- Controlling behaviour
- “My way or the highway...”





Trauma Responses

RESPONSE	CHILD/YOUTH	ADULT/WORK
----------	-------------	------------



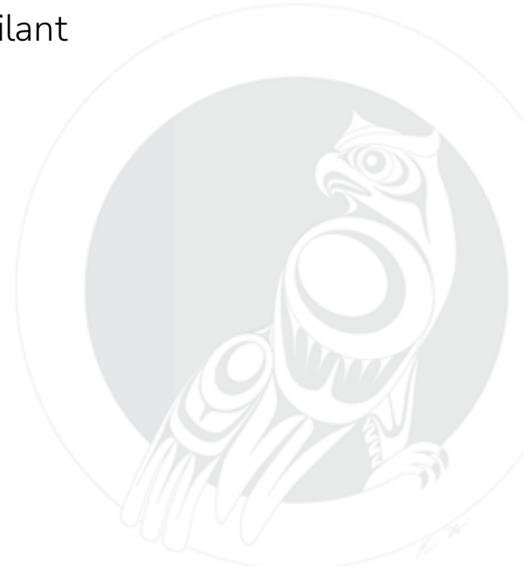
- Kicking, hitting, yelling



- Bolting/fleeing situations

- Controlling behaviour
- “My way or the highway...”

- Perfectionism
- Hyper-vigilant





Trauma Responses

RESPONSE	CHILD/YOUTH	ADULT/WORK
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- Kicking, hitting, yelling

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- “My way or the highway...”



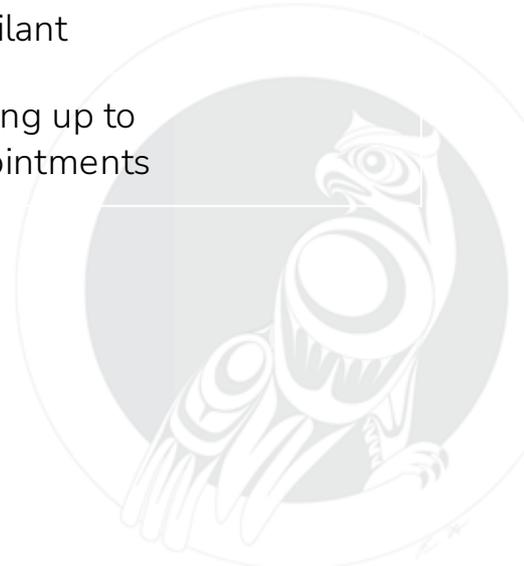
- Bolting/fleeing situations

- Perfectionism
- Hyper-vigilant



- “Spacing out” or daydreaming

- Not showing up to work/appointments





Trauma Responses

RESPONSE	CHILD/YOUTH	ADULT/WORK
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- Kicking, hitting, yelling

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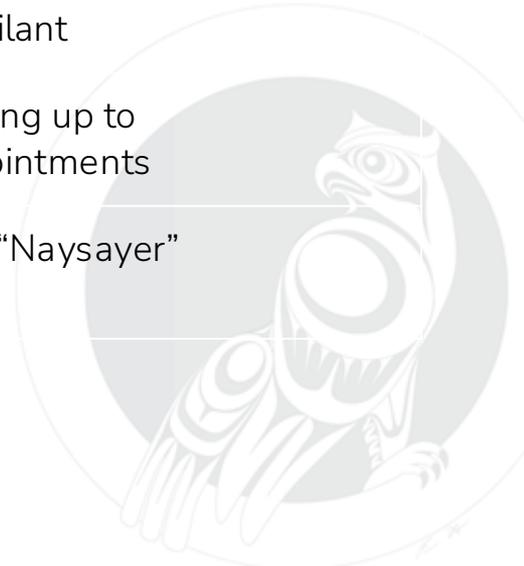
- “Spacing out” or daydreaming

- Not showing up to work/appointments



- Learned helplessness

- The team “Naysayer”

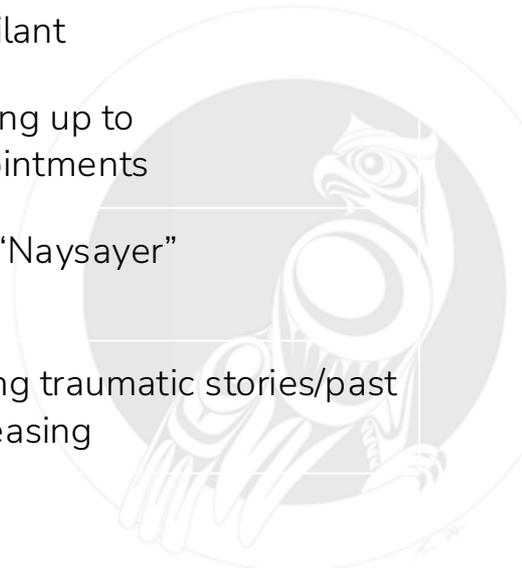




Trauma Responses

RESPONSE	CHILD/YOUTH	ADULT/WORK
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Kicking, hitting, yelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Controlling behaviour● “My way or the highway...”
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Bolting/fleeing situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Perfectionism● Hyper-vigilant
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● “Spacing out” or daydreaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Not showing up to work/appointments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Learned helplessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● The team “Naysayer”
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Becoming staff’s little shadow	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Oversharing traumatic stories/past● People pleasing

***Trauma responses might explain behaviour, but it does not excuse behaviour.





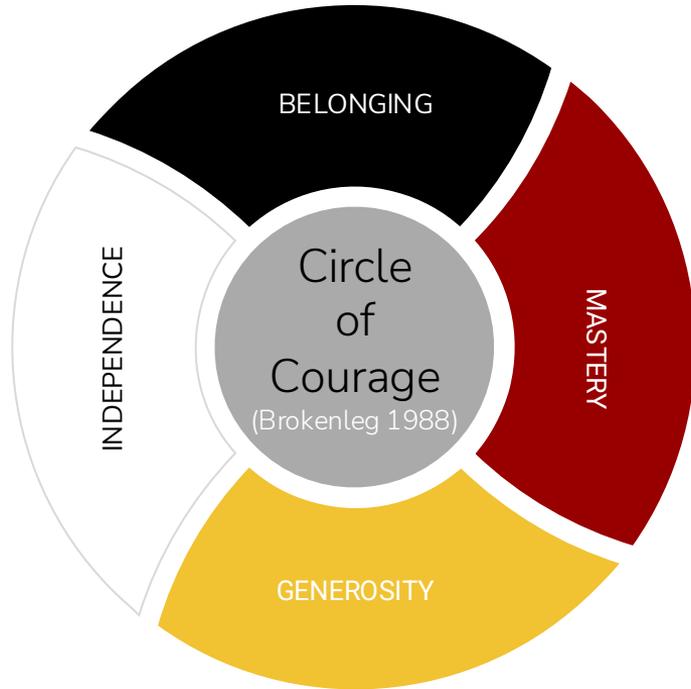
What About Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion?

- EDI operationalizes and reinforces colonialism rather than disrupting it
- To be welcomed is to be not at home
- You cannot “include” us on our own lands and territories
- No evidence that demonstrates EDI work has recognized or surfaced Indigenous issues
- Reinforces Canadian Socialization (erasure of Indigenous peoples)





Supporting Indigenous Resilience in Young People



Belonging - relational connection:

- Are youth feeling happy, grounded, and well supported?
- Have I nurtured a sense of trust and connection?

Mastery - self-determination:

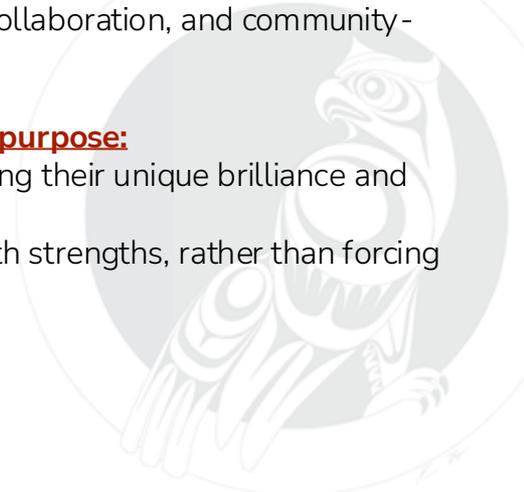
- Have I created space for youth to exercise agency and autonomy?
- Do I know their aspirations?

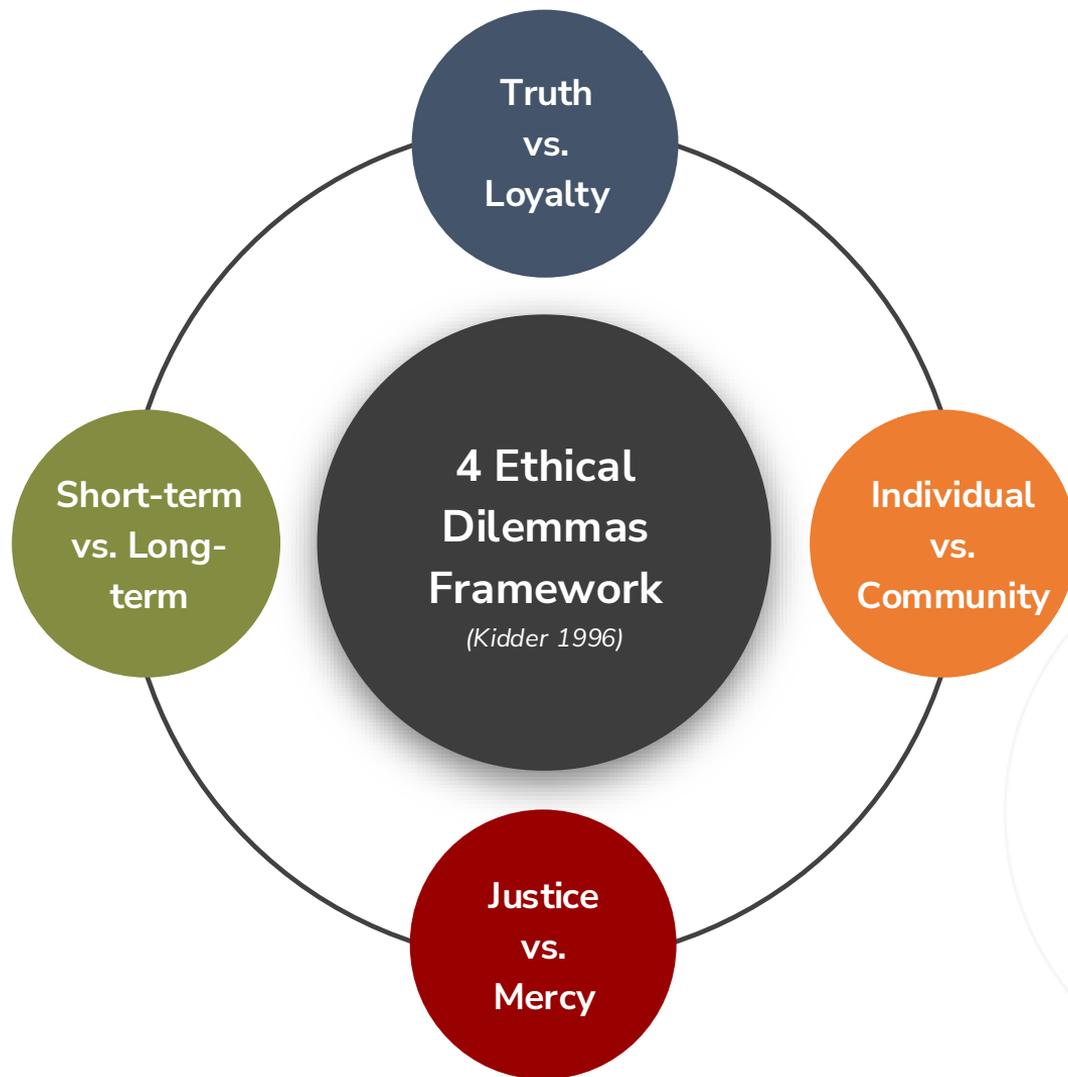
Generosity - collective contribution:

- Have I made room for everyone to meaningfully contribute their gifts?
- Am I encouraging leadership, collaboration, and community-centred contribution?

Independence - creative power and purpose:

- Can I support youth in expressing their unique brilliance and independence?
- Am I shaping roles around youth strengths, rather than forcing them into rigid roles?







“Safety is not the absence of
threat... it is the presence of
connection”



DR GABOR MATE





Feedback helps us grow!

Session Details:

- Course: [Len Keynote](#)
- Instructor: [Len](#)

CONTACT

lenpierreconsulting.com

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