

Beyond September 30: Doing the work

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

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

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

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

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

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

Research and read:

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

Build relationships: *“I will continue working to build positive relationships and I will ask how I can help carry the weight. I will also continue to support the work by reading, listening, and acting to create change and awareness.” ♦ “Work to develop and build relationships with my colleagues. Be open, listen, and learn.” ♦ “Support Indigenous staff and students in their healing journey. Use kindness and love to let them know I am listening.”*

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

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

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

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

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

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



