

Treasure Mountain Canada 5: Touching base with school librarians across Canada

Saskatchewan School Library Association

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On October 20th & 21st, 2017, I was fortunate enough to attend both the Manitoba School Library Association (MSLA) annual conference and Treasure Mountain Canada 5 (TMC5). Treasure Mountain Canada 5 is a biennial research symposium founded by David Loertscher focusing on action and academic research studies across Canada in the field of school librarianship. The theme of this fifth symposium was *Culturally Relevant and Responsive School Library Learning Commons*. The MSLA conference entitled *Truth in Our Stories: Seeking a Path to Reconciliation* focused on examining the role of school libraries in addressing the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions Calls to Action. It was apparent from the theme of both sessions that there is a desire across Canada to address the increasing diversification of cultures seen in schools across the nation, as well as incorporating greater inclusiveness of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures in school library learning commons (SLLC) in Canada.

The MSLA conference began with a song from the Brown Bear Drum Group, followed by the keynote address by Melanie Florence. Melanie is the author of several books, both fiction and non-fiction, including *Righting Canada's Wrongs: Residential Schools*, *The Missing*, *One Night*, *Rez Runaway*, and *Missing Nimama*. In her address, Melanie spoke very personally about her relationship with her grandfather, a residential school survivor. She described her father as one of the success stories of the residential school system, and, by this, she meant that after leaving the school he was so ashamed of his Indigenous heritage that he denied it and hid it, even from

his family, for the rest of his life. It was only after his passing that Melanie became aware of her grandfather's cultural heritage, and this prompted her to learn about residential schools and her own Cree background. During her session, she read aloud her book *Missing Nimama*, a picture book describing an Indigenous mother who is among the missing and murdered, and her living daughter. Each page is divided into two perspectives – one from the daughter who is now living with her grandmother, and one from the mother who is watching from the spirit world. It was a powerful reading, and this book would be an excellent title to use for introducing the concept of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women to younger students. Melanie also read her latest picture book, *Stolen Words*, which tells story of the relationship she wishes she could have had with her grandfather. In the story, a young Cree girl discovers that her grandfather, a residential school survivor, cannot speak any Cree. The grandfather tells her that the words were stolen from him as a child. The granddaughter then finds a Cree primer in her school library and brings it home to help her grandfather recover his stolen words. In the story, the grandfather and granddaughter begin learning the Cree words together. This title would be excellent for beginning conversations with younger readers about the intergenerational effects of residential schools.

Following the keynote address, we were invited to attend one of numerous breakout sessions. There were sessions offered on traditional storytelling, the Seven Sacred Teachings, the heartbeat of the drum, as well as other author sessions. In the end, I chose to attend a session titled "Why Indigenous Literature Matters" by Dr. Nigaan Sinclair, and I was not disappointed. Dr. Sinclair spoke about how differences in worldview affects notions of authorship. His descriptions of Indigenous authorship, as well as how Indigenous cultures read stories from the

natural world, were highly informative, and challenged me to reconsider my understanding of what constituted a story. He also showed the portrayal of Indigenous cultures in western literature beginning as far back as the 1800s through graphic novels. I found Dr. Sinclair's presentation fascinating, and would love to have him speak to teacher-librarians in Saskatchewan.

Our afternoon began with a second keynote by Tricia Logan, the Education and Outreach Coordinator at the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. Tricia spoke about the work being done at the Centre following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and, specifically, invited everyone to participate in Project of Heart. Project of Heart is an excellent way to teach students about the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada, while also providing a lasting work of art as a visible reminder of the history of residential schools and their impact on Indigenous peoples in Canada. While I could attempt to describe the wonderful work being done through Project of Heart, I would be best off directing you to <http://projectofheart.ca/what-is-project-of-heart/> and simply encouraging all of you to participate with your students.

Following Tricia's keynote there was another breakout session. This time we could choose between sessions on colonialism, the Métis, and addressing the truth of residential schools. I chose to attend another session by Melanie Florence. In this breakout session, Melanie shared some of the research she had gathered while writing her book *Righting Canada's Wrongs: Residential Schools*. She opened her session by saying that she would present it to us exactly as she would present her session to teenagers. Melanie's open approach to sharing her findings, and her connections with her own life story, made for a powerful presentation. I would highly recommend her as an author to present to students of any age.

Following the MSLA conference, delegates who were also attending the TMC5 symposium were invited to visit the National Human Rights Museum. If you have never visited this extraordinary museum, it is well worth a visit if you are ever in Winnipeg. The museum has displays addressing human rights conditions both in Canada and around the world, but the architecture itself tells a human rights story. Stunning artwork, intriguing displays, and fascinating architectural designs made this a memorable portion of my weekend.

The following day I was able to participate in TMC5. In preparation for this portion of my weekend, I read several research studies prepared by other participants. While not every author was able to attend, many of the researchers were present and spoke about their studies. Some were even Skyped in to discuss their research. The other participants had the opportunity to ask questions and receive clarification on different aspects of the studies conducted. One challenge presented throughout the day asked participants to consider how we can make our SLLC more of a two-way learning experience by inviting patrons to become active participants in making and sharing knowledge. This discussion touched on the Maker movement, drawing students into assisting with collection development, and having students share book reviews, resource lists, and assignments for future learners.

I was very intrigued by Carl Fusco's presentation on [Revisioning the Library as a Learning Commons - Video](#). I have been actively trying to transform my library into a learning commons over the last few years, and Carl's ideas were both a validation of my own work and a source of new ideas to consider. Dr. Dianne Oberg, a professor at the University of Alberta Teacher Librarian Distance Learning Program and one of my former instructors, spoke about ideas for addressing cultural relevance in the SLLC in her paper [Theoretical Frameworks for Thinking about the](#)

Work Ahead. For a complete list of the papers being addressed at this year's TMC5 conference, visit <https://sites.google.com/site/treasuremountaincanada5/table-of-contents>.

This was my first experience at a TMC symposium, but I found the experience valuable for two reasons. First, it was a very clear reminder that the issues facing teacher-librarians in Saskatchewan are not unique to our province. Teacher-librarians all across Canada are grappling with the same issues, and many teacher-librarians are looking at innovative solutions for incorporating greater cultural responsiveness in the SLLC. Second, research on improving the effectiveness of SLLCs in Canada is alive and well, and Saskatchewan needs to be a part of this important work.

Over all, I left the weekend feeling empowered to try some new ideas and inspired to reflect on my own journey of cultural responsiveness. I wish to thank the SSLA for the opportunity to attend these sessions, and I would encourage everyone to explore this year's, and past years', TMC papers. You may find, as I did, inspiration to examine your space with fresh eyes.