

Is Acknowledging the Land Enough?

BC Teachers' Federation has demonstrated a long-standing commitment to teaching for and about First Nations in BC. BCTF also led the way in creating a culture of land acknowledgments; teaching teachers, students, and school districts about how this vast province sits upon traditional territories of the many First Nations who have inhabited these lands since Time Immemorial. The current protocols for acknowledging the stewards of the land are intended to show respect, humility, and reciprocity necessary to build nation-to-nation relationships. The result today is our growing familiarity with names and locations of the territories of specific First Nations; this has come through awareness built by the regular practice of publicly asserting Indigenous kinship with and title to the land. For example, who does not know that Vancouver is situated on the "shared, traditional, unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Peoples?" Thus, we have laid the groundwork for the next stage, having arrived at a juncture where we need to decide how we can deepen our practice. To accomplish this, we encourage challenging conversations by posing questions like:

- How meaningful are our land acknowledgements and are they accurate? Have many of the words used simply become clichés and formulaic?
- Are they serving the need of strengthening conditions for and leadership of local First Nations?
- Do land acknowledgements mask settler-colonialism and uphold institutions that continue to harm Indigenous peoples?
- Are land acknowledgements becoming the new status quo that assuage feelings of guilt and contribute to a climate of "settler innocence?"
- Are land acknowledgments a distraction from meaningful action?

Hayden King first prompted us to think about the practice of scripted acknowledgments that have become "tick the box" exercises. He questioned how meaningful they are if they offer no redress, sense of responsibility, action, or compensation. He also prompted us to think about replacing them with deep and serious conversations about settler-Indigenous relations that stem from promises that are merely performative, thus meaningless. Would those deeper conversations provide opportunities to think more critically about the new ways colonialism is manifesting itself? These are tough conversations, but they need to take place. We invite Indigenous members and settler-allies to continue to hold and occupy the space for Land Acknowledgements but to do so as truth-seekers, truth-tellers, and disruptors. We need to question how we use that space and what type of reconciliation and obligations must flow from the uncovered truths. To prepare for this we need to learn more from Indigenous voices because they will guide us. *So, study, read, listen, and be prepared to start these discussions around kitchen tables, in staff rooms, and in our union spaces.*