



RIGHTING RELATIONS

Adult Education for Social Change

Hearts Wide Open:

The Process of Building Righting Relations West Hubs

Introduction

a. Righting Relations: Adult Education for Social Change

Righting relations is a women-led, pan-Canadian network that strives to strengthen the capacity of adult educators and adult education to bring social change through political and economic literacy for a just society in Canada.

It is a pro-active approach to social justice change initiated and funded by the Catherine Donnelly Foundation in partnership with the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights, Tri-County Women's Centre, City for All Women Initiative and Dene Nahjo. This initiative aims to develop critical consciousness and skills focusing on the collective, community learning efforts, active citizenship, democracy, personal and social transformation.

The objective of Righting Relations is to build a national network of adult educators by lending priority to the process of regional hub/network development with adult educators who work with and are from Indigenous, Immigrant, Refugee and Low-Income communities. These regional hubs foster, advance and encourage a mutual dialogue of critical learning, support and collaboration.

“In light of this sacred time together that we shared with newcomers, Settlers, Canadians, Indigenous peoples, and many mixed blood people, I approached more closely the idea that maybe, identifying myself as “Canadian” might not be so bad if being “Canadian” means we create our “village” together. In this space at the Gathering, we actually created a new kind of “Canadian”; a new way to move forward together without alienating each other due to our inherited legacy of colonization, residential schools, racist policies and practices, etc.

What is unique about Righting Relations is that it engages Adult Educators willing to be the change agents that heal, empower, and enlighten Canadian settler populations, newcomers and Indigenous people with unique workshops, learning circles, and cultural reclamation/acknowledgements that engender mutual respect within their spheres of influence, both personal and professional.”

Righting Relations Western Hub participant in the 1st. Regional Gathering



b. About this Toolkit

This toolkit summarizes and presents the learnings and processes used in building the West Regional Hub in Edmonton, Regina and Winnipeg. Whilst each of these cities adapted the activities to address their particular needs, there maintained elements which were constant: using a folk school model, using a de-colonial lens, circle facilitation and being women-led. We welcome you to use this toolkit in your community, and invite you to connect with the Righting Relations network. Email info@rightingrelations.org and 'like' us on facebook to connect.

c. Who is This Toolkit For? Adult Educators, Community Organizers, Facilitators, Conveners

The western hub spent time discussing and elaborating on the definition of “adult education.” We have come to the conclusion that adult education involves bringing awareness and clarity while unveiling injustice through lived experience and stories. It requires a critical lens, courage and willingness to speak and learn the truth of oppression. It also must show that something can be done and that there are ways to change rules to affect people’s lives.

We also agree that adult education is about facilitation. It is about creating spaces for people to express themselves and their own experience while learning from their own light. Our methods of adult education include creating discussion, art, circles and storytelling to challenge issues and bring a critical lens to economic and political injustice and move us forward on the journey of decolonization. Radical adult educators are also described as standing, being present, and in solidarity with just causes. Adult education is based on the idea that we all have knowledge and truth and we need to share it with each other.

Adult educators should take care of themselves and support each other in order to dedicate their lives to change unjust situations they are passionate about. Adult educators empower themselves to strengthen and give voice to others. Thus, building capacity is fundamental to their work, their wellbeing and the wellbeing of others. Adult educators provide a human connection and work under the premise of cooperation instead of competition - solidarity.

Building the confidence of adult educators has become a central theme to the work. In circles, participants expressed the feeling of isolation and frustration when they are standing up for justice in their communities and speaking truth to power. Righting Relations has become a space of not only solidarity, but a space for healing and strength to continue the work.

d. Folk school model

“It was challenging to enter into a project in which they were invited to create the outcomes, explore their needs as adult educators, and have women led, heart centered and decolonial relationships. The vision when presented to them was somewhat intangible and people had some discomfort with this. However, it is exactly the openness and the selected folk school model to build up the Western Hub which has allowed for the flexibility, transformation, and safe spaces created in each city and at a regional level and allowed the participants in the hub to define the way forward.”

Righting Relations Western hub participant

Learning about the Highlander Folk School from the Highlander Research and Education Centre and its role as a space for critical reflection within the civil rights movement in the United States, inspired the evolution of the Western Hub of Righting Relations. The Western Hub built itself on the ideas that the space of Righting Relations had to be open and fluid; allowing the agenda to be determined by the participants. It is about ‘making the road by walking it together’ and to do so requires a commitment of trust and release of ownership or control over a process.

Righting Relations thus in the west became about creating spaces for people to share their work and efforts while creating space to workshop and build collectively. For each gathering, a core facilitation team would agree to the leading and central question and then would allow the agenda to roll with the needs and collective vision of the group. The three circle process which evolved is meant to establish a foundation by which to move into these efforts and to deepen relationships.

e. Decolonial lens: land-based teachings

The decolonizing framework that guides the work of Righting Relations at the national and regional levels is one of the greatest learning experiences for participant adult educators. Indigenous women have taken leadership positions and are helping non-Indigenous men and women learn from their land-based teachings and experiences, modeling relationships based on their respect and connection with the land while being clear and open about the wounds and injustices of colonial structures that are foundational to Canada.

Indigenous women have also expressed a pleasant surprise to hear settlers’ and immigrants’ love for the land and commitment to condemn colonial injustices in Canada. Heart opening conversations about participants social and political location have solidified the anti-colonial commitment of the group and has helped heal issues of racial guilt and resentment. This has allowed women to relate to each other in deep and trustworthy ways. We have learned that we have all been impacted by colonization and the manifestations of it today are our collective responsibility.

f. Creating the space: women led circles, safe, heart centered

3 Circles

Meeting in circles allows us to see each other, to be equal, to take individual breaks when needed (respecting the circle and never walking through), to always show our complete self.

The energy travels around the circle and stays within. Everyone is important in a circle for it to be whole and complete. No one can hide and everyone has the opportunity/responsibility to share their thoughts.

We adapted a model of three circles in which the first one is the introduction to the topic and the people present; the second one contains the main conversation; and the third one allows us to share our main take away.

“The Circle has healing power. In the Circle we are all equal. When in the Circle, no one is in front of you. No one is behind you. No one is above you. No one is below you. The Sacred Circle is designed to create unity. The Hoop of Life is also a circle. On this hoop there is a space for every species, every race, every tree and every plant. It is this completeness of Life that must be respected in order to bring about health on this planet.”

Dave Chief, Oglala Lakota

Community agreements

Community agreements are a frequent practice in popular adult education, community organizing and dialogue. Establishing a community agreement at the beginning of the first session helps participants to have a first sincere conversation about their individual needs to make the space safe for them. Those needs and the collective behaviour they require are discussed, agreed upon, and become basic rules for all participants.

Community agreements make the space alive by handling participants’ control of the rules in which they are going to immerse. It is important to clearly describe the intent of the community agreement. It is also necessary to review the community agreement at the beginning of each meeting to re-establish the ground rules and use it as an opportunity to address any concerns.

Group and individual needs can change from one meeting to the next due to experiences in previous meetings, new participants, the topic of the meeting, etc. Community agreements are living documents and have the potential to evolve. This reinforces the importance of continually coming back to the community agreement in new sessions.

We have found that community agreements have the potential to spark some conflict or lively conversations. Some participants’ needs might contradict the needs and principles of others. Allow a respectful conversation to take place where people can clarify their points of view and negotiate. In all our experiences, consensus was reached.

Welcoming



Welcoming people into the space became an effective and frequent call to remember the objective of the gatherings as well as the fact that we live on traditional territories of different Indigenous communities.

In welcoming people to the meeting and grounding ourselves on this land, the starting point is to fight/debunk the idea of Indigenous peoples as historical characters. Indigenous peoples exist, and we all are obliged to find decolonial ways of relating to each other. In the case of Edmonton, Regina, and Winnipeg, we are in Treaty land, and the treaty was always mentioned.

One of our early learnings and commitments was to integrate ceremony into all we do. This has become a protocol.

Stories

In Edmonton, stories became foundational to the meeting. Not only did we root the meeting in the community agreement and the traditional territories, but also in short stories that called on an important teaching (value) that was related with the topic of the meeting. A special sensorial experience was awakened before starting.

Mingling and Creative projects

Despite participants living in the same city, they have not always met each other. Therefore, mingling and art spaces have the intention of giving people topics to talk about, relate through art, and build relationships.

These spaces were reinforced through the sharing of food. Having supper together was important to nurture bodies in the meeting and relax the environment. In all three communities, the food consumed in the circles was prepared and purchased ethically with a lens to buying locally and supporting small entrepreneurs.

In a trustworthy space, where the rules are clear from the beginning, conflict does not have a negative connotation. It becomes an opportunity to learn. We are finding the capacity for disagreement and constructive engagement has grown among participants and they are finding ways to turn these into moments of learning and transformation.

Intergenerational learning has also taken place in the circles. Elder women are guiding the groups with kindness, love, and resolution to Righting Relations. They are bringing knowledge and experience while helping to guide the group where it needs. Also, younger generations are bringing new realities to the table and the way they experience the world.

Collective responsibility

Both planning and delivery was led by a group of participants who wanted to assume this responsibility. In most cases a small group of women met a couple of weeks before the meeting to identify the needs of the group according to previous meeting notes. Furthermore, these women defined the objectives of, created the process to be followed, and distributed responsibilities to deliver the next session. Together these women would hold the space, monitor if anyone needed additional follow up or support, and moved the conversation forward. Thus, this toolkit is the result of our collective experience and wisdom.

g. Emotional distress and support

One of the most important teachings the circle received happened in the first regional gathering. A Mi'kmaq Indigenous woman talked about the power and need of crying:

“One of the best ways to be a rebel is to cry. Colonials have taught us to separate ourselves from feelings. It has dehumanized us. The fact that people feel that we can cry is because we have created a safe space.”

Righting Relations Western Hub participant

People need to have the space to cry to feel. We made a commitment in our first regional gathering to not run to console if someone were crying and shift the energy of the circle. We rather respect the emotions, acknowledge them by attending to the physical need of tissues and standing next to the person without touch to allow the person to ground and gather the energy to complete their thoughts. Crying is part of healing and showing our deepest selfs.

There are four ways of healing: laughing, talking, crying and dancing.

Teaching received in St. Paul, 20 June 2017

h. Teachings



- Allowing things to happen and unfold, learning from them and connecting to Indigenous teachings and land-based teachings has challenged people to get out of their normal approaches to engaging with content and learning.
- The experience of starting the conversation based on principles to guide the work and acknowledge individual experiences with justice and injustice without pre-determining outcomes has created trust and commitment with the process of Righting Relations.
- People with disabilities have unveiled a lot of teaching in the circles regarding their needs in terms of time and activities and how that affects their participation. That has influenced how we manage the space and work. A lot of space creation, passing the mic, working together, rotating leadership and mentorship was learned in order to overcome the difficulties, plan with everyone in mind, and focus on the conversation that will take us to action. This action is grounded in deep conversation and buy in for longer term sustainability.
- Each learning experience is becoming action in all cities. Experience-based learning brings radical change action.
- Open our hearts to what comes, and trust the wisdom of the circle. We are learning to let go of control.
- Women are committed community builders and educators. Their commitment has moved the project forward and it is taking life in each city in its own unique way.
- The circles have created knowledge that has been shared selflessly in the circles.
- Heart-centred conflict resolution allows for individual and personal change without leaving any resentment.
- Finding and connecting with diverse organizations and individuals in cities has created spaces of intersectionality and cultural learning.
- We have learned to work in circles; to take the time that each conversation needs; to negotiate the time of each activity and conversation, with the most vulnerable in mind always.

The Process: Building a Community Hub in Three sessions

These three sessions were the draft model used in Edmonton, Regina, and Winnipeg. Each city lead group, discussed the process at least one week before the meeting and altered it to make it useful and appropriate to them. Thus, please be flexible and adapt each session to the needs of your group.

Key pieces of the process

3 circles

Each Circle followed a similar format

1. Creative expression
2. Calling into the space and Prayer
3. The opening circle to ground in the space
4. Sharing of food
5. The second circle as the heart of the dialogue
6. The closing circle to close the space and project forward

We ran the circles from 5-9 pm in each community allowing time for dialogue, dinner and networking. The space would open at 5 pm however the formal elements did not begin until 5:30. The first half an hour was open to networking, mingling, catching up and doing creative activities together.

We would suggest an opening of the space at 5:30 pm and then starting at 6 pm to allow people the time to transition from their day into the space and allow time for travel.

Brief Background on Righting Relations

In the first circle, we provided context and background information about Righting Relations. Some talking points are included here:

- Righting Relations is a growing network of adult educators.
- We are working together to right relations and work towards political and economic justice.
- We are looking at how history manifests itself in our communities and how it impacts the most vulnerable in our society.
- We are embarking on a journey of learning, growing and building a community of practice, together.
- We are part of a national movement/network. There are currently three circles moving that encompass adult educators from Regina, Winnipeg and Edmonton. This larger regional hub will grow to include the full of Western Canada and connect to the North and to the two other hubs in the East and Central regions that make up a national network.
- Righting Relations is a journey towards action and social change. We will explore how these conversations apply to the community and how we can strengthen our collective resolve and capacity.
- We are calling into the circle to look at the bigger picture and how it flows while moving into action towards justice in our communities and across the country.
- Righting relations is a women-led movement meaning that the work is heart centred, holistic, creative, rooted in kinship, and radically inclusive of the gender spectrum.
- What occurs through the conversation will shape the evolving process. In between each learning circle, a team planning meeting will be held to discuss the process and intention for the following circle. We guide the process.
- We will be holding a total of three circles. Future movement will be determined by the group.
- There is an annual regional gathering.
- Western Hub is currently being facilitated by the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights.

Circle Process Plan

	Circle One	Circle Two	Circle Three
Goals	<p>Creating relations among the group and to validate the experiences and perspectives of each person</p> <p>To explore and make visible political and economic injustice in our communities</p>	<p>To build on circle one relations and conversations and explore the role of adult education in seeking political and economic justice</p>	<p>To confirm commitment to Righting Relations and maintain network</p> <p>Facilitate increased connection among and across participants</p> <p>To move towards identifying areas of action and capacity building</p>
Supplies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rocks • Sharpies • Magazines and collage materials • File folders • Glue sticks • Flip Chart paper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Markers • Tiles or pieces of cloth • Community agreement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community agreement
Creative Opening Space	<p>Smudge and preparation of space and facilitators</p> <p>Participatory Creative Activity - We used simple folders and magazines to allow people to collage to create a file folder to hold materials.</p> <p>Guiding Question: Righting Relations is about connecting our stories. What is your story? What brings you to seek justice?</p> <p>** Require small tables to allow people workspace</p>	<p>Smudge and preparation of space and facilitators</p> <p>Creative Activity This will be done as a small tile project that people will share in the closing circle.</p> <p>Guiding Question: What is your role as an adult educator? What do you educate about?</p> <p>** Require small tables to allow people workspace</p>	<p>Smudge and preparation of space and facilitators</p> <p>Mingling Time</p>

	Circle One	Circle Two	Circle Three
Welcome and Prayer	Prayer and Calling into the Space led by Elder. Sharing of a story or teaching.	Prayer and Calling into the Space led by Elder. Sharing of a story or teaching.	Prayer and Calling into the Space led by Elder. Sharing of a story or teaching.
Circle One	<p>Opening Circle Your name</p> <p>What kind of adult education do you do, or want to do?</p>	<p>Opening Circle Your name</p> <p>Share a moment where you felt justice or felt included.</p>	<p>Opening Circle Your name</p> <p>Share a moment recently when you felt equipped and confident as an adult educator.</p>
Community Agreement	<p>Set Community Agreement In partners, discuss what each of us requires from ourselves and each other to be able to fully participate in this space together?</p> <p>After discussion, have each pair share one key theme that came up for them.</p>	<p>Come back and review community agreement.</p> <p>Do we need to add anything or revise anything?</p>	<p>Come back and review community agreement.</p> <p>Do we need to add anything or revise anything?</p>
Dinner			
Circle Two	<p>Guiding Questions: From your perspective, what does political and economic injustice look like?</p> <p>How do political and economic injustice manifest in our communities at this time?</p>	<p>Guiding Questions: What is our role as adult educators in addressing economic and political injustice?</p> <p>What do you see an adult educator as being?</p>	<p>Guiding Questions: What do we need as adult educators?</p> <p>What are the opportunities (advantages) in us being together?</p> <p>How do we support and strengthen each other?</p>

	Circle One	Circle Two	Circle Three
Circle Three	<p>Each person will receive a rock and are asked to write one word on their rock on what they are taking away from today.</p> <p>Circle: What has today done for you? What is one word that you are leaving with?</p>	<p>Each person will share their creative piece and share their role as an adult educator and any leaving thoughts.</p> <p>Circle: What is your role as an adult educator? What do you educate about?</p>	<p>Circle: What do you want to see moving forward?</p>
Thinking Ahead - Questions to think about for next circle	<p>Share with participants - think about for next session:</p> <p>What is our role as adult educators in addressing economic and political injustice?</p> <p>What do we need to be more equipped as adult educators to address economic and political injustice?</p>	<p>Share with participants - think about for next session:</p> <p>What do we need to move towards economic and political justice in our community?</p> <p>What do we need to be more equipped as adult educators to address economic and political injustice?</p>	

Appendix: Righting Relations Foundational Frameworks

Popular Education

A dialogical and experiential process of facilitating collective reflection and action towards societal transformation, with a focus on the most marginalized sectors of society. Everyone is a teacher and a learner, and we begin with people's lived experiences as a site for developing critical consciousness and awareness of power. Practicing an intersectional analysis, we question all oppressive power relations and recognize the interlocking and inter-connected nature of systems. We practice praxis: action – reflection – action as our learning process and recognize that we make the road by walking.

Women Led

Recognizing the traditional teachings on Matriarchal Societies of the Wabanaki

A collective and heart-centered approach to leadership, based in dialogue, process and building deep kin-like support networks. Being radically inclusive, building trust, relationships and safe space are integral to how we work. Validating and building upon people's knowledge in emotions, body, mind and spirit, we recognize multiple ways of knowing. We seek to embody and cultivate hope, creativity and wholeness into our reflection and analysis. We recognize the importance of self-care, healing and community support in sustaining popular educators.

There shall be a preponderance of self-identified females present at all times, and at times the space may be open to self-identified females only.

Right Relations

We take inspiration from and recognize the reconciliation movement to right relations between Indigenous and Settler communities in Canada and draw from it, a way to build bridges across diverse peoples - Indigenous, Settler, Immigrant and Refugee. It is a practice of the Universal Laws of love, respect, compassion and empathy for all of Creation, recognizing our interconnectedness and the need to share power and space equitably. We recognize the importance of being authentic and being right with ourselves in the process of righting relations