

“The Indigenous perspective in the director’s chair was essential. Throughout the process, [Yvette Nolan] modeled how to be inclusive and how to flip the circle.”

-Joel Bernbaum

In the Reasonable Doubt video-series, Metis dramaturge Yvette Nolan, who is of Algonquin/Irish descent, shares with educators how the teachings she has received from her elders shaped her approach to co-creating and directing Reasonable Doubt.

This is how Yvette explains “flipping the circle”:

“This is a traditional structure of everything – hierarchical. In theatre, it’s the director at the top and then everybody else down below and everyone is trying to achieve some vision that the director has (represented in the triangle). I’m not interested in that at all. So we just tip it on its side and smosh it out a bit and it becomes a circle.



Every theatre room you go into, the director will say, ‘Everybody’s ideas are valid and the best idea in the room wins.’ It’s just like, ‘That’s not true, in my experience.’ That director has some idea that they’re trying to fulfil and they’ll take what is useful if it fits into their already extant vision.

I’m not interested in working like that because my teachings, my elders, taught that the Elder doesn’t hold all the knowledge; the Elder just holds the circle, and everyone in the circle has knowledge, and so that’s kind of how we run the room.

Everyone brings all of their knowledge and all of their selves and all of their history to the room and then we have that much more knowledge; we’re that much richer.

Someone has to sort of guide the ship and that is what I do as the director in this shape, but all of our knowledge makes a bigger thing.”



How do we hold the circle Nolan describes as we dwell in Reasonable Doubt with our students, colleagues, and community?

Like ourselves, each student in our class “is molded from a distinct history, knowledge tradition, philosophy, and social and political reality.” How can we bring students into intercultural dialogue as they learn, the ethical space “where new currents of thought may emerge?” (Willy Ermine, “The Ethical Space of Engagement”)

Nolan’s practices are grounded in the values of “kindness, honesty, trust, inclusion, respect, humility, accountability, alignment, and confidentiality.” Careful, consistent attention to these values gave all involved in the production of Reasonable Doubt “a starting point for dealing with resistance, frustration, and fear” (Nolan, RD video).

Nolan explains, “We worked to ensure that everyone in the theatre knew they were always welcome in the room – the rehearsal hall – from the opening circle and smudge, to the feast to honour the ancestors, to the open rehearsals for members of the Saskatoon community.” (Nolan)

“If you’re doing theatre that matters like this, you have to prepare your audience, and then you have to take care of them while they’re in the room, and then you have to follow-up with them.”

Nolan’s description of the theatre is equally true of our classrooms: “We are sitting there sharing space with other human beings.” How those human beings interact is critical.

“In your classroom, you have to weave the basket to carry the heavy things. Students have to be willing to come into this to carry the heavy things together. No one person can carry it on their own.”

Tracy Laverty, Metis consultant

How can we create fluid, co-constructed learning experiences with students, families, and community, continuously eliciting evidence of & responding to their evolving understandings, strengths, and needs

Here are some of the things that the playwrights’ did in the process of creating and staging the play that we can apply in our classrooms:

- o Invite Elders, families, and community members to support & guide the students and teacher as they study the play. If possible, build in ceremony, such as smudging, and choose meaningful learning spaces and places within and beyond the school.
- o Provide choice in where, how, when, and with whom students engage in learning – options that students can self-select, inhabit, and move among as they learn.
- o Provide students with the time and means to process their experiences and make connections between the play and their own lives, communities, and world. Consider journaling, art, music, writing, drama, speaking, drumming . . .
- o Consistently embed thinking routines and discursive strategies that facilitate students’ meaning-making & equitable engagement in dialogue and discussion.
- o If/when students sense that the script does not accurately or fully represent points of view, including their own, invite them to weave their own words into the play. The playwrights themselves affirm that “the play is never done!”