MM: Welcome to the fourth episode of the Conversational Métis Sash! This episode took place virtually with Dr. Laura Forsythe. Dr. Forsythe is a Métis scholar and professor in the Department of Education at the University of Winnipeg. She is a community-based mobilizer and the co-editor, with a wonderful circle of editors, for the Journal of Metis Thinkers. Our conversation honours wahkotawin as a way of life. It reflects how we can honour our responsibilities by considering what we owe to our obligations; centering our Michif relationships, and beyond. This is reflected within Laura's commitments through the circles she's a part of, but also, to the students, being future teachers, she teaches at the University of Winnipeg. Our conversation honours Wahkotowin, and reflections about the fields of Truth Before Reconciliation Education and Indigenous Education, and our ways of life and being within them.

Well, kih-chi maarsii, so much Laura for being able to join me today. I know, as Michif, we love being able to introduce ourselves first and foremost. Would it please be possible if you could please introduce yourself and tell me a little bit about yourself, too?

LF: Yeah, absolutely. I know myself well. So taanshi kiyawow! Hello! Laura Forsythe, dishinihkaashoon. My name is Laura Forsythe. Ma famii kawyesh Roostertown d-oshciwak. So my family a long time ago, lived in Rooter Town. Anosh, ma famii is Winnipeg, wikiwak. So today, my family lives here in Winnipeg. Ma parentii, or my ancestors, the Huppe, the Ward's Berard's, the Morin's, the Lavallee's, and the Cyr's. Niya en Michif, so I am Métis, from the Red River settlement. And I grew up here in the Métis heart and homeland, like the generations of women before me. So, my maternal great-grandmother is Nora Berard, and she was born in Rooster Town, on land known as Lot 31, which was owned by my ancestor, Jean-Baptiste Berard. My lineage includes Joseph Huppe, in the Victory of Frog Lake, and my great-great-grandmother Sarah Morin came to Rooster Town, specifically to marry Peter Berard. That's me!

MM: Wow! And Laura, can you please share some of your research interests and what you've been up to?

LF: Yeah, so my PhD work explored the lived realities of Métis women in the academy and community as well. So, anyone who really contributed to our sense of self and knowing, so for example, I to sit down with Christi Belcourt and Celeste McKay and Emme LaRoque and Sherry Farrell Racette, and speak about their experiences here in the academy, just being a Métis woman, recognizing that we are erased in the academy and our contributions are erased often. I wanted to talk about that just because of my experiences of PhD student and as well as going through three other degrees. I didn't see my people and I wanted to know why that was. So, I talked with the people who've done this work for 40 years.

Out of the academy in my role, I started to look at educational sovereignty, Métis methodologies, Métis ethics is a new venture for me, and looking at the experiences actually of Métis teachers across the homeland because we want to see what their lived experiences, right? We talk and the grandmothers talk a lot about education being our path forward, but we recognize that a lot of folks are not teaching about Métis in their classrooms and so why is that? And so, we went to

those who are the most passionate about that and talked to them about their experiences. So that's one of our new projects.

Bringing folks together across the homeland is really, I think, paramount to how we are going to become less invisible to each other. So, less … and more visible to each other, I think is really important. So, we have a project where we have for years been bringing and gathering Métis folks together to have conversations like the one, we're going to have here to learn from each other and to just support one another in multiple ways. So those are some of the things that I spend my time on.

MM: That's brilliant and you're such you're such a wonderful Michif Auntie taking care of us all in such good ways (laughter of MM and LF). Maarsii Laura, maarsii so much for all that you do and all your contributions. We all really appreciate it.

LF: Aw, thank you.

MM: With all this to say too, as you've also mentioned as well but what does being Michif mean to you?

LF: Well, I think it's actually really complicated actually, right? Like, on one hand, when we think about peoplehood, when we think about bringing together everyone who shares this collective understanding of who we are and what makes us, us. I'm really proud of that. And I spend a lot of time hoping and reconnecting folks to that history. But I also, when we think about nationhood and we think about politics currently in our nation, I'm also an elected member of the Manitoba Métis Federation. It's really complicated, right, because we are not living up to our ways of being in terms of wahkotowin with our relatives at the moment. So, it makes it difficult and challenging, and our governments may not do what we think they should be doing to hold and to help our people. So, I think that when you're a Michif person who has historically, we have stood up for our people and help the most vulnerable. It's difficult in a challenging place when that's now what we're seeing our governments doing. So, I think right now, super proud and I'll, you know, go to every mountain top and talk about how I'm Metis. But also, I think that having difficult conversations and thinking through the complexity of what it is to be Métis is something that we also must do.

MM: It is complex. It is very complex.

LF: Yeah, we've been spending, like I said, the last couple of years prior to the fracture in 2021-2022, you know gathering all of our relatives from the five governing bodies and it's become increasingly difficult to do that on one hand, but on another hand, it hasn't been because we all come to that place as people, seeking relatives, seeking connection. And so, we basically check our politics at the door if possible. And we do see, you know, in our gathering that will be happening here in May, we have folks coming from all across the country that have various rules in our nations and will come and be in that space as people and not nations and it's going to be

beautiful. So, I think that we are capable of having complex conversations in a way that serves our people as opposed to our governing bodies.

MM: And that's why we gather. That's why we do it too, right? It's to understand different points of view. It's to understand different lived experiences. And when we're able to come together, such beautiful, wonderful things can happen. However, it's also the complexity and the goodness of the conversations that also can come through it as well. And with this too, you mentioned as well with this gathering space, and this is in relation to ethics?

LF: Yes, yes.

MM: Oh, wonderful!

LF: So, we're going to be looking at -- so I mean, within the structure of Canada and with the institution, academic institutions, we follow, you know, various rules and rules and things that have been created for us in community, except they aren't what have been created in our community. So, you know, OCAP has been sort of the rules that we follow in terms of how to engage with Indigenous peoples, but we also have to recognize that Métis, although have shared similarities, also have some differences. And so how do we go about creating a model of framework, but conversation is what we're going to have here coming up in May around where have we been? So, what is the history of how did OCAP come to be? How did the NAHO principles of Métis ethics come to be? And where do we need to go? So, we're gathering folks who will sit at the kitchen table, together. There will be talking just as long as there will be listening because that is a big piece to reflection and to see how it will impact our actual lived lives and our live realities and how are we going to walk forward as a people, not as nations, but as people.

MM: As people. I love that. That's brilliant. And that, okay, that really makes me want to go (laughter).

LF: It's going to be a good time. It's going to be a good time. We're also going to be like recording those conversations and having a rapport and sharing it out. And like, really saying, unlike the NAHO - Métis ethics principles which were created in half a day, this isn't that, right? This is us having a complex conversation, talking through some of these things. What do we think that this could be? Who should be engaged? Who should be involved? How do we adhere to our principles of wahkotawin in that, right? It begins with a keynote on the Monday night and it will be Métis aunties coming and talking to us about Métis ethics.

MM: I love this.

LF: So how are we to walk the earth, right? Not how do we fill out the form, but how should we walk the earth when we're thinking about engaging and work with Métis families, Métis communities, and Métis individuals. It's going to be amazing.

MM: I'm so excited for you. I really want to go, fingers crossed, I can go now. We will see (laughter of LF and MM). And since we're on this fun topic too, is it okay if you can actually share what ah…? Oh, I don't know if I ever pronounce it properly, but I do wish to one day… Wah-ko-to-win.

LF: Wahkotowin?

MM: Wahkotowin, wahkotowin…

LF: Wahkotowin.

MM: We made it today! Okay beautiful, wahkotowin. Can you please share a little bit about what that is for folks who might be listening, who might not understand the concept?

LF: Yeah, interestingly, like there's a lot of scholarly work that's come out about wahkotowin. But that's brilliant and beautiful, and I'm so excited that folks are bringing it into the academy. But it is actually, a way of life. It's so many different things to so many different people. It is a set of rules unspoken often of how we need to walk the earth. And so, Maria Campbell, the great matriarch, has brought this to the academic world with, with Brenda Macdougall, and it's actually a Cree concept, and it's about, oh, it's so many things. So basically, it's about, it's simple, it may be a term you may have heard before, is all my relations.

MM: Right.

LF: This idea that we are of course related, not literal relatives, but that we are all in some way related and that not only are we related to humans, but we're related to, you know, the land, people, living, ancestral, and those to come. The spirit will itself, like creatures that inhabit this space. So it is with all beings, both human and non-human that we are related to. And if we think about our obligations to people we are related to, well how do we walk then?

MM: Mmmm.

LF: Right? How do we treat people, how do we make decisions, right? It's basically Maria Campbell says that from birth to death, our responsibilities and our reciprocal obligations must be upheld. And so, for me, that means that I have to uphold them in the academy as well, in the K to 12 classrooms, when I go into schools, right? Like that the relationships that I foster and my commitments to community are lifelong as opposed to self-serving in the moment because I have a project at this time.

MM: Right.

LF: Right? And they talk about it being this, a worldview, that's grounded as I said in Cree philosophy and that we're absolutely related to one another and it implies a strong embodied feeling of belonging to a Métis collectivity, right? And so that's why when we see folks that are coming or rediscovering or uncovering that they are part of our community, I absolutely

welcome them. I ensure that I can connect them with whoever or whatever it is that they need because I understand that that was stolen from them.

MM: Yeah.

LF: It's stolen from their memories and it's part of my responsibility as a Métis person to ensure that they have a feeling of belonging with us now that they've found that they are related. And so wahkotowin as a concept, it makes us have to behave in culturally appropriate ways while ensuring that we look out for one another and that goes against some of the ways in which others walk in the academy because it's very competitive and it's, it creates a different vibe than trying to lift everyone collectively up and so how I choose to walk the earth is that I understand that I have an obligation to all Métis folks, to include their voices as relatives and to honor their words in all of the places and spaces that I get to sit, right?

And so, this is a huge undertaking if we think about it, right?

MM: Yeah.

LF: And it's also when folks reach out and whether they're my students, their student teachers, they're, you know, folks and community and they say, "Oh, can you come and share?" And I have to say yes because that this wealth and knowledge is we are supposed to share them and we are supposed to share them freely, knowledge is not ours, right?

MM: Yeah.

LF: Like to keep and to hold and to be like, "Well, I know this, and you do not."

MM: Right.

LF: So, there's a lot of pieces about wahkotowin and its role to transmitting Métis knowledge and identity to our younger relatives, right? There's a big piece where like I said, like Métis aunties, Métis grandmothers who are our first teachers are called to this work. And it is paramount that this has to go beyond personal benefit, right? Like, and it comes to a place of collectivity or collective responsibility.

MM: Right.

LF: There's a scholar named Adam Goudry used it as one of the bases of his dissertation work, which is really exciting then because we can go and see his work on this. But he reminds us that what wahkotowin encourages individuals with the specific skills to contribute to their well-being of their relations. And so, we talked about well, you know, I create gatherings, right? Because I have a gift to bring folks together in spaces…

MM: You do; you do.

LF: where they can feel comfortable and safe. And so, if that is what my gift is then that is what I owe to my relations, right? And we have to ensure that this principle of kinship and

relatedness and that is grounded in reciprocity and responsibility is in all of the actions that we take as Métis people, whether that be at our homes, in our communities, at our jobs. We don't get to say, “Okay, well, I'm Métis here, but I'm not Métis when I go here.” Like that is just not, when you walk with this kind of responsibility and obligation to wahkotowin, you can't check it at the door and be less or be smaller or not share those teachings. And so, as teachers, as educators, when I think about what wahkotowin, I think about well, how do we treat people? What is our obligation to tell our stories? What is our obligation to the families of those little ones? Like there are so many pieces connected to how we would walk in that space in a K-12 space. But I don't forget to do with adults, either. I always call them my kids (laughter of MM). And I don't know if they appreciate whether I am an older Auntie, so I'm getting there, right? (MM laughter continues).

So, but it's really about remembering, right, that responsibility of being related to one another. How do I then have to walk?

MM: Right.

LF: And it's very different than the institution would want us to behave in some respects, right, because it is more complicated. It takes more time. I remember Rita Bouvier talking to me, a Métis matriarch…

MM: Yes, yes.

LF: Talking to me and telling me about the responsibilities that we had to community when we sat with them, and we started a project with them. And that her responsibilities had lasted over decades, right, because of the work that she had done in the 80s and the 90s and the 2000s. And so that we should never take on more than we will be able to be responsible for, because even though our project ends or that year ends, you know, where you're teaching that learner, oh no, you are now connected to that learner and their family or that entire community through your research. And so, you have to keep room in your heart and in your day planner to (laughter of MM) be able to, right, to be able to answer what they need. Oh, you know, the other day, “Oh, Laura, do you mind coming next week to Ottawa for three days? Okay, I can be there…”

MM: Right.

LF: Like so you're called upon and we have to answer it.

MM: Now would it be possible if you can share maybe what the Métis sash means to you? And if it does impact you, perhaps in similar or different ways, then this wonderful, beautiful ever moving concept as well.

LF: Yeah, absolutely. So, I think, I mean, that's an excellent question. I'm going to linken it to the Canadian flag, right, just for a minute. And we historically as Canadians have been exceptionally proud of our flag. We put it on our backpacks and our jackets when we go somewhere else. We want people to know that we are Canadian, right? And then something happened in 2020, 2022, right? And it switched what that flag meant. And it's tainted it, for a lot of people. And then most recently, something else has happened that has now reclaimed that flag, right? And, we are now incredibly patriotic, and we want to have that flag, and we've come back to it.

MM: Right.

LF: So, I want to liken the sash to that for a very good reason. So, I have always adorned myself with a sash. When I started working as a Métis inclusion coordinator, I wore it literally every day for four years so that on campus I could be a symbol and a signal to the 1400 Métis students that were at the University of Manitoba that we were here, that we had always been here. I just wanted them to see themselves in that space.

And then a conversation started in the academy by some of our more senior thinkers that was kind of anti, like anti as in A-N-T-I, anti-sash. It was like tokenistic almost. Now, perhaps because so many Fétis [fake Métis] started to wear that sash, right? And so many folks would put it on but not actually know what sash they had on and didn't know the deeper meaning within them. Because one of the things you need to know about sashes is that every single sash created has a story that has history and is connected to a people. And so, if you didn't know that, then you might be wearing it incorrectly.

Another thing that's happened recently is that the Manitoba Metis Federation has a specific sash. They went down to the United, well, I think Chile or Peru, and they had a nation, fantastic, they paid some folks from an impoverished place to create our sashes for us. But then that meant that they created thousands of the same sash, thousands upon thousands of them. And that print and that sash became a symbol for them. And for some, like in the convoy, that message is powerful, and that message is something that people can get behind. And for others, some of the actions that they're taking, people can't get behind. And so, then that sash becomes tainted, just like the Canadian flag became. And so, I personally have chosen not to wear any of the sashes that they have gifted me because of what I feel that it stands for right now.

It doesn't stand for unity, it doesn't stand for wahkotowin, it isn't about adhering to who we are as people, and it's going down a path that I don't necessarily want to be on.

But interesting, you asked me that today. My local, so here in Manitoba, we have the homeland wide Manitoba Métis Federation, then we have regions, and then within those regions we have locals, which is actually the community. It's actually the folks that get together and spend time together and stand for different things.

And so my local has created their own sash, right? And this is something that many locals here in Manitoba have done, like the Two-Spirit Michif local, the Canoe local, St. Norbert... They have their own sash. So, when we get together, everyone from that local wears their sash and can be really proud of who they are and what they stand for and what they do for community. And so, we had the order form come out today. And so, I'm really excited about getting that sash and about putting that sash on and representing my people in that way.

So, it's very complicated. I think the sash is very complicated gesture and symbol within our nation that is often underestimated, I think, all the things and all of the meaning that is within that sash. I know that, you know, here in Manitoba, we have the Festival de Voyageurs and Voyageurs were sashes. They're not Métis, right? They're not Métis. Some became Métis or their children's children became Métis, but they themselves were French. I am descended from Voyageurs. And so, lots of folks here in Winnipeg around February are adorning themselves with sashes that have no connection, right, to the nation and are a French-Canadian symbol. And so, I think there's all sorts of different ways. And so, when I think about the sash, I think about those meanings. I think about the colors. I think about what was the intention of putting them there. What is the person who is wearing them or, you know, or holding them saying? Right. And what is the meaning of that? Because it can mean so many different things. There isn't one way of understanding sashes. in my mind.

MM: Mmm. Maarsii, maarsii. That's such an important take, honestly, on it as well. Because even for me, I'll just go into personal too, just so you know. But for me, I was honored my Métis sash by my Elder Edme Comstock upon, ahh maarsii, upon graduating with my Bachelor of Education on Treaty 7 territory. And so, when I look towards the Métis sash, for me, I think of it encompassing all of my educational responsibility going back to community. So, whenever I wear it, usually nowadays, I don't wear it all the time. But when I do wear it, I wore it a couple weeks ago when I shared my family's history in relation to scrip. I wore it when I shared my family's stories. I wear it when I talk about my family. Or when there's a big event. And if there's a gathering space too, sometimes I like wearing it when we're with each other, as well. I find that it's very meaningful inside these ways because there's safety and there's love and there's care. And that's how I carry my sash. So that's why I've been very curious of how others carry their sashes and the stories that they have to tell in relation to it, too. So kih-chi maarsii so much for sharing, Laura. I really appreciate it.

Can you please share what courses you teach?

LF: Yeah, absolutely. I have had the privilege to teach Indigenous credit requirements for the last decade. So, I teach at one institution. I teach Indigenous studies, 101s, essentially. Right. And looking at our histories, our cultures, our traditions, and getting, you know, doctors, lawyers, educators, engineers, social workers, a baseline of understanding that maybe what they learnt in school, maybe what they've learnt throughout their lived experience and the media they've been surrounded by is a lie.

MM: Mmmm.

LF: And there's another side of the story that they need to consider, especially if they're going to be working with our communities. That's why I have never put that work down, because I think that is a vital piece that we need to be doing.

But at the University of Winnipeg, I spend time with educators. And so, I teach pre-service teachers. And we have a course called Indigenous education. Unfortunately, it's not a content course. So, learners that come into that space and maybe some of the teachers you'll be working with came into that space with a biology degree or a math degree, and they never had to take a course on Indigenous anything. And so, they don't carry content, but we don't teach them content in that course. We teach them, like, practices and tools of how to teach with an Indigenous pedagogy, which is very challenging, as one can imagine, if you don't have any knowledge of Indigenous anything.

So, I teach that class. I also teach a course called Contemporary Issues in the Inner City. In Winnipeg, we have an inner city that the Winnipeg mayor denies exists. It's not actually a real place, but we all know it's there. And so we talk about the complex issues around teaching in those schools that are in the core, and some of the things that we need to think about. And I try to teach them to be empathetic, actually, over those 13 weeks, right, and to recognize that not everyone has your lived experience. And they may be struggling with things that you have no understanding of, and to be kind and to be compassionate and to be patient. My love of teaching is in my post-bach because that is where I've got to create some courses for teachers who we graduated that were not ready to do this work, but definitely want to.

MM: Yeah.

LF: And so, we have a course called Beyond Riel, which speaks specifically to bringing Métis content into your classroom. It is a mix of both content like, where they learn the history of Métis people and our governance and our culture, as well as learn about tools, resources, curriculums, videos that are out there that they can bring into their classroom. And then I teach an Indigenous class. I can't remember exactly what it's called, but basically, (laughter of MM), it's around... I'm like, what did I title that? You know? My gosh, what is that It's basically pragmatic... Oh, here it is: Pragmatic Approaches to Indigenous Education. It, because once teachers are in the field, they don't know what tools to use, what lesson plans, what's been vetted, which Elder is actually Indigenous, like those pieces.

MM: Right.

LF: And so, we share with them 150 resources that they can bring into their class that are thematically designed to help them…

MM: Brilliant.

LF: in the various different types of subjects or disciplines that they actually teach in. So that they can feel confident. So that they can say, “Actually,” you know, if there is any pushback to what they're trying to teach, that they can say, “Well, this is actually from this nation, this community, this Elder. And it was created with you know, this organization that they know has been vetted, that they know is teaching the right things.” I think when we often just Google, we could go down the wrong path.

MM: That’s right.

LF: And I think that's what makes a lot of educators nervous.

MM: Right.

LF: And so, this helps them to have resources and also be able to share with all of their colleagues that didn't get to come to the class because they don't have the time. Right.

MM: That’s right.

LF: And so, it really does focus on pragmatic things. I'm not, I don't spend my time teaching things they can't replicate in their classrooms.

MM: Yeah.

LF: Because we do that enough.

MM: Yeah.

LF: And I really love getting to see teachers and teach teachers in the field that can then the very next day or the next week implement those lesson plans and be changing their practice instantly.

MM: Brilliant, because that is so undertalked about is the immediacy, because usually what a lot of practitioners like to do is share cultural values, cultural traditions, these kinds of things. And that's really beautiful and that's magnetic and that's so important. However, teachers who are non-indigenous cannot replicate that within practice because it's inappropriate and further it could also lead to appropriation, unfortunately.

So, teaching the teachers, hey, this is Canada's history. However, through our perspective, this is human rights and its non-partisan as well. And that's what's really key for teachers to also pick up and go so they feel ready and confident.

I am so delighted to hear that you are doing this work and leading this work. I really want to learn more about the Beyond Riel. Well, I think that that is just a conversation for you and I maybe after this podcast (laughter of LF), because I am so delighted to hear that because more and more teachers also don't understand who the Métis are. They don't understand us. They think that we're a cumulation of mixed marriages and that's what makes us who we are. But in fact, that's not, well, it's a little true, but it's not completely the whole picture. Right. So, no, that's really brilliant that you were doing this and further the passion I already witness as well. You're,

you're completely caring and compassionate and further energized by what you're doing. And that just also makes me very happy to witness. So, kih-chi maarsii so much.

LF: Oh, thank you.

MM: So, this is actually really beautifully connected. In what ways do you infuse your Michif cultural identity into your teaching practices and/or teaching philosophy?

LF: Well, I find, I always find it really interesting and challenging when people say that they are walking in two worlds, because I don't. I walk in a very Métis world every day of my life. And so, my pedagogy is a Métis pedagogy because that's really the only way that I can imagine it being, right? And when you adhere to the principles of wahkotowin, in everything that you choose and in every action that you take. That comes through in your teaching, right? And I very much have a Métis auntie vibe when I'm in my classroom, right? It's unintentional, you know, that is the way that it is.

And so, for example, when we think about Métis aunties and how they say hard truths sometimes. I teach in inner city programs and access programs, which means that those learners historically have been barriered. I will say purposefully from not entering the institution. Right? And, and so when I talk to them about AI, and I talk to them about doing the work themselves, I remind them that they're in this space when people didn't want them there and that they are there for an education and that education is something that they're going to walk with forever.

And that other folks who have always been invited to the institution, they don't actually need the piece of paper. They don't actually need that education. They're going to get that job anyway. And so, it's really important for them to come to this space, the space that held them outside the door for so very long and get every single thing that they can, which means that they have to actually learn the skills. They have to read the papers. They have to be able to write. They have to be able to cite. Because that is how they're going to move forward.

Our agenda, our collective agenda from those who live in the inner city, from those who have been marginalized, from those who have been left out. And so, I say these things in class, and remind them that we are in this position, including myself, because we lived in the inner-city, because of our hard work, not because we are lucky. And that means that they have to continue to work hard, right?

MM: Right.

LF: And when they walk out, that they carry these gifts into their community, and that we have an extra responsibility, right? As role models to those who come behind us. And these are just offhand comments that I make throughout the term, right? Reminding them about our space and place. And so that's very much, to me, a Métis auntie…

MM: Yes.

LF: Standing at the front of the class, right? And that I have high expectations of them, and they know it, right? And they try to meet them. To me, well, someone could say, “Oh, well, that's not Métis pedagogy.” And I was like, “Well, then you don't know my aunties.” (Laughter of MM and LF).

MM: You don't know my mom (more laughter)!

LF: You don't know my kitchen sit at my kitchen table, right? And so, I think, you know, that's what I think of when I say…

MM: Right.

LF: “Well, how, you know, how is your teaching practice? That's what comes to mind for me.

MM: I love that. Oh, I cannot tell you how much I love that (laughter of LF and MM). Oh, I see, I see myself within that. That's why that's so, so connective. Oh, my goodness, Laura. Thank you for - thank you so much.

Laura, I know with your work, you're really focused upon Indigenous education, Michif values, Michif stories. I am really curious, though, about what does Truth Before Reconciliation educational research mean to you. And where do you see its place in teacher education and/or as a field of study?

LF: Well, that's a big question, isn't it? I think one of the pieces that we talk about in Indigenous Studies is the work by Eva Jewell and Ian Mosby, and they for the last five years have done a report outlining the success of the completion of the 94 Calls to Action.

MM: Mmhmm.

LF: Unfortunately, because for multiple years, zero Calls to Action have been completed. This year they didn’t have that accountability report; they just had a briefing saying that it seemed futile to continue to keep saying that nothing had been done.

And they talked about the barriers and one of those barriers is public interest, right? One of the barriers to the success of the Calls to Action is public interest because it is the public that votes for their politicians. And politicians and bureaucrats, policymakers want to keep their jobs ultimately. And so, they do what is the will of the people. Which is what they should be doing, you know?

And so, when I think about the truth and the education part of the truth and reconciliation. I see that as why it is so important. Because when people know - when they know better, they do better I think is the saying right? And if we are unaware because we have learnt a different history, or learnt a different way of knowing and being, that that challenges why they should care, honestly.

MM: Yeah.

LF: And I appreciate, that some, have written and researched that it doesn't matter of how much we teach people, some people will never be on side with us. And can I appreciate that, but there are many that will be. I stared my educational journey in 2011, so a few years after the official apology, at Simon Frasier University, and I saw and have witnessed since that time, incredible leaps in terms of reconciliation both at the institution but in education.

MM: Mmmhmm.

LF: The world I went to, to do my Bachelor of Education, in 2015, and the world that my students now live in, as teachers is completely different. And is everyone doing this work? No. But I'll tell you, there are far more people doing this work than there were. And I talked to my history students about what does that actually look like? What does it look like from Beverly Jacobs in 2008, standing up and saying, "You can say sorry, but these are the things that you need to do." And one of the things that she said that you needed to do was to educate Canadians.

MM: Mmhmm.

FL: And then that was echoed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report. We need to educate people. And so, when little ones now in K-12 are learning about the seven teachings, they're getting to see how drums are made. They're talking about Louis Riel beyond just being murdered. I mean, these are all incredible steps forward in reconciliation. That because we want immediate gratification, we dismiss.

MM: Mmmmm.

LF: We don't recognize them as the huge accomplishments that they are. I have looked at the grandmother's and auntie's works for 40 years. And looked at what have they contributed? How have they contributed? How has it been taken up? And when I tell you it's been incremental change, right? Right? Like it's been very, very slow since the 1980s to do this work. There have been a lot of conversations. There have been a lot of action and advocacy and activism done largely by women to make this happen. And so, when we dismiss the fact that people are reading Phyllis's story on September 30th, we are not recognizing all of the work that went into that, nor are we recognizing how incredible it is that little ones across this country can tell you what happened to her in her orange shirt, right?

And so, education is absolutely necessary. And us as educators and administrators at both K-12 and at post-secondary, in our research we have found, when working with Métis teachers, that their experiences in post-secondary are pretty good. It's when they get to K-12 and the folks who haven't been educated the way that their children are being educated are making decisions and policies.

And those folks are the ones that have missed the opportunity to this point anyways, to truly engage in the histories of this country. And that is where we're seeing an issue. And so it isn't that Truth and Reconciliation isn't working. It's working on the next generation…

MM: Right.

LF: And there's this generation currently that is making decisions without having any of that learning.

MM: The foundational knowledge there, because it missed, it got missed for them. So, I'm curious about professional development in these ways. However, there's also that notion of interest, as you've also mentioned, too, even the interest of needing to do that. Or would it be an obligation for them to then do that then, too? And then they don't feel comfortable or ready to even take that on as well. So no, very curious about that finding. Maarsii so much for sharing that because it's speaking to systemic issues because the little ones are taking it on and they're also ready and prepared and delighted to do so because they know that they can take a stand in loving and caring ways. And they're understanding fairness, they're understanding justice, they're understanding kindness and what it could actually mean to deeper and deeper and deeper levels. So that's not the issue. The issue is the adults.

LF: Well, I think one of the things that we don't do very well in this country is to demonstrate and to teach adults how legally sanctioned discrimination has created the issues we see today. Right, we don't talk about that. So, and, when people don't understand why they're witnessing what they're witnessing, they fall back on stereotypes and myths about people, but don't truly grasp what is happening in front of them and why it's happening. And so, I think that we have like responsibility in professional development to go beyond what I'd like you to teach in your classroom, but to understand more deeply the very grown-up issues that are happening around you…

MM: Right.

LF: So that you can teach them. So, I have the privilege to teach with the Manitoba Rural Learning Consortium, and to teach teachers from all over the province, and they come together to take a course called Beyond Riel, and we talk about how they're going to bring Métis content in the classroom. And we only have 16 hours together, but I appreciate those hours because we do get to go into and over not only Métis history pre-1885, but also what's contemporarily happening. So, they have an understanding of even the fracture of our nation. So, they as grown-ups can see what's happening and then distill that information to K to 12. And I think that we miss that piece a lot in professional development, because often it's only a day long, or perhaps it's only an afternoon long, or maybe it's only 45 minutes of your day that you chose to go to that talk.

MM: Right, right.

LF: Can you learn about the complexities of the misrecognition and the basically the jurisdictional issues of Métis people in 45 minutes? No, you cannot. Right. And so, they don't understand what's happening around them or why it's happening.

MM: Right.

LF: And they also, you know, are used language like Métis and Indigenous and not understanding, well, why that is hurtful to the kids that they have in their class. And there are all these really large complex things happening that we just don't have time to truly engage. And therefore, we can give ourselves permission to not engage because we aren't that interested. And I think that's one of the pieces that troubles me the most about K to 12.

I was telling a story last week when I was in Portage la Prairie about when I became an educator. So, I was a high school teacher. And I had always wanted to be a high school teacher. So, I took high school teacher courses, and I had a minor in history and a major in First Nations studies. That's what it was called at the time. And I went into my first classroom. I didn't know how to teach people to read. Why would I need to know that? I was a high school teacher, but I was faced with the very real situation where many of the learners were not reading at a high school level. They did not have that foundation, so I guess I could just go, "Oh, well, they should have learned before…" and went on with my life. That is absolutely not what I did.

I took a post-bach in early learning so that I could reach so that I could find out how can I help these learners? How can I, you know, teach them essentially to read or teach them numeracy things that they should have had.

MM: Right.

LF: So, I think that as an educator, if I go through my whole training and I get to the classroom and they ask something of me that I do not know how to do, like teach Indigenous ways of knowing and being and bring it to my, like my curriculum, because it's mandated. Then I have to say to myself, "Well, then I guess I got to go back and get a post-bach in Indigenous knowledges because I'm not equipped to do this work." And so, that's how, that's how I approached it and that's how I think that folks should approach it. And I'm so thankful that I do get to teach so many teachers and administrators about our people because they genuinely recognize within themselves that that was a piece that was missing.

MM: Right.

LF: And that they needed to do additional work, right, to do this well. And I often say to teachers, well, like, why are we doing this work? Like, let's think of why are we doing this work? Well, yes, of course, there's like these fringe benefits like people will know about us. But what it's actually for is that Métis children will see themselves in the classroom. They will have a sense of belonging. They will have a sense of self-worth. It will increase their self-esteem. It will help to combat youth suicide. Like there are very big connections to what we're doing that seems off the cuff, simple. I just talked about the sash today. No, you have done all of these other things. And so that's why it's important that you come on back when you realize you don't have that knowledge.

MM: Right.

LF: And so, I'm thankful to professional development hours, even more so days, but also programs like the Consortium that teachers can come and engage over months. For times to learn about where are their gaps, talk about them, learn the histories, and then be able to bring it into their classrooms.

MM: I love that. So, it's really meeting themselves where they're at, but knowing that even that 45 minutes can be beneficial so long as they continue to come back and back and back.

LF: That's it. Right. That's it. Thankfully, we had, this past week, Dr. Lucy Delgado come and talk about their project, Mending the Gap. And it was looking at Indigi-queer and Two-Spirit bringing them into the classroom and content into the curriculum. And the teachers around the tables were saying, like, “This isn't even offered. This is not something that we usually engage in. It's not on the docket for the professional development. Like, this is a gap that we see.” And I also see there being a gap for Métis-specific content and knowledge, right?

MM: Yeahhh.

LF: How can you possibly teach 634 First Nations, you know, four communities of the Inuit and five governing bodies of Métis under the umbrella of Indigenous education in 45 minutes? You can't. You can't. And then we get lost, right? The Inuit get lost. We get lost.
Individual nations' ways of knowing and being get lost. And things end up becoming pan-Indigenous. I'm thankful to opportunities to learn, but also, we need to recognize how much more there is to learn.

MM: That's right.

LF: And to provide opportunity for it.

MM: And that requires humility.

LF: I always say to my students, I don't know everything. I learn something new every single day. Every time I get to speak with someone in my circle that is an expert in something else, right? I thought I knew something, but apparently there's so much more for me to learn. And this idea that, well, I have this degree. Maybe I have a post-bach. Maybe I have said position. Well, I know it all. Like, and I think it's like a non-Indigenous humility issue, actually, right? That you can't just say, I don't know. I don't know. And us as educators in the K-12 classroom or the post-secondary classroom, someone asks me a question that I do not know the answer to. I say, “I don't know, but I'll find out.”

MM: That's it.

LF: Right?

MM: That's it.

LF: You know, I'll find out that because you're an administrator in a K-12 program that you know everything. Well, it's not possible.

MM: No.

LF: It's a lie. Why uphold it?

MM: (Laughter) I tell my students, I know a lot, but I don't know everything.

LF: This is it, right? Or if they bring something to you, they say, oh, did you read this article? Or do you know this thinker? Or have you seen this artist? I'm like, no. Thank you so much for bringing that to me. Right? Like, amazing. Thank you.

MM: Yeah. I love that. maarsii. Yes. Sorry. My mind is just racing right now for ideas.

LF: Sorry.

MM: No, I love it. I love it so much. And how do you address settler colonialism? Because also within the TRC reports, too, they also mentioned as well that true reconciliation cannot take place unless colonialism is first addressed. So, with this, how do you address settler colonialism in your curriculum, pedagogy, and/or within your teaching practices?

LF: Well, I address it. I, it isn't the elephant in the room.

MM: (Laughter) good!

LF: It is on the PowerPoint slide. Right (laughter of MM)? And we talk about exactly what has happened, how it has been, you know, perpetuated for centuries, and how it's still present in our classrooms. Right? Especially when we're talking about bringing residential school stories into our classroom. We talk about denialism.

MM: Mmmhmm.

LF: We talk about why that might exist. Right? How it serves those in power to have those conversations, derail truth and reconciliation. I am very open and honest and transparent about the effects of colonization on my people, my family, and our classroom.

MM: Right.

LF: Right? Because I think when we present concrete, lived realities of people in front of educators or in front of students, that helps them to understand the enormity of the issue, but also that it is affecting people around them. Even if they don't realize it affects them.

MM: Mmhmm, thank you. Laura, you've shared already so much of about your practices and further your pedagogies. But, what do you hope that are key takeaways that your students keep from your courses and further from you being their wonderful teacher?

LF: Ultimately, I want them to walk with knowledge. Really (laughter of MM). It's not really about, you know, so that they can make informed decisions about how they're going to do this work. I hope they takeaway, that our relationship is long lasting, that they can email me and ask me, do I know, do I know a jigger? Can I come to their classroom? Do I have a reading on blank? Right? Like, oh, they were talking to their administrator, and they wanted more information on math and Métis ways of knowing. Like, I'm hopeful that they recognize through wahkotowin that my obligation to them is beyond when our class ends after 13 weeks. Right? And so that does make me very busy because I do go into classrooms and, you know, I have to set people up with jig master's (laughter of MM) and help people, you know, make connections to Elders and things like that. But that's one of the big things that I'm hopeful for.

And that when folks go into community, they can have conversations about me that are good. If that makes sense. Like, someone says, oh, yes, my cousins are always coming to tell me that they know people who know me because they'll say, oh, yes, they were chatting. And I said, "Oh, that's my cousin." Like, I want, I want to walk in a way that people are proud to be my cousin (laughter of MM), maybe is what I'm saying…

MM: Right.

LF: But that they talk fondly of the time that we spent together, and they remember it.

MM: Mmmm.

LF: Like that the pieces and the stories that were shared are things that they are actually in community. Telling people that then they are able to identify that we and somehow are related (laughter of MM) through, through some like six degrees of separation to Laura Forsythe. I am just hopeful that folks are having those conversations that it has initiated or created something. Yeah. I'm hopeful for that.

MM: I love that. It's, it's all about the kinship and it's all about the relations and taking care of each other, but also taking care of the knowledge that was just gifted. That's really beautiful.

LF: Well, and I expressed to them that it's their responsibility to then share it. Right.

MM: That's right.

LF: Like again, we are, we don't keep that, that, the idea of Knowledge Keepers. I think we can't take it too literally.

MM: Yeah (laughter)!

LF: Because it's not about keeping it.

MM: That's right.

LF: It's about holding it and then sharing it. And so, I'm glad that, you know, there are folks in community that are sharing more broadly the teachings that they got in the classroom because not everyone gets to come to us at the institution.

MM: That's right.

LF: Yeah.

MM: That's right. I love that. Maarsii. And Laura, do you have any further thoughts you'd like to share with in-service Michif teachers who will be listening to our conversation, but also to other folks who will also be listening in into this conversation? Because again, this whole podcast series is actually going to be a gift going back to community. So, do you have any thoughts you'd like to share any, anything, any further musterings?

LF: Yeah. I think that the work that we have all collectively signed on to do is difficult. And although there are some really incredible highs, there are going to be some lows as well. And that if we create networks of support and people, we can speak to that we can get through those low times when there is pushback from administration, when there is pushback from community members or classroom, other educators. We need to create like an epicenter of support for yourself.

MM: Mmmm.

LF: To be able to do this work, because there will be some debrief needed on some of the things that you're hoping to do, but that our responsibility, our obligation to our children and our communities is beyond our personal feelings about the pushback. Right. And so, it is more important to continue to do that work and to find a support system, then stop doing it all together.

MM: That's beautiful. It really “do” take a community to do this.

LF: Oh, absolutely. I've, I sit in circles, many different circles with Métis women predominantly. And sometimes we bring in my Anishinaabe friend and, uh, but mostly it's Métis women who are sitting around that circle and we just support each other, like through all of this, right? Because what we're doing is really challenging and there are various, you know, stakeholders that don't want us to do this work. Uh, the status quo is cheaper. The status quo is easier for Canadians, uh, than having to recognize and to atone really for what they have done. And so, we need a support network that will allow us to continue to do this work when there is that pushback. So, I'm really thankful to have the circle of women that I get to sit with. Almost every day, uh, to do this incredibly difficult work.

MM: Maarsii, maarsii so much. Laura, I cannot thank you enough, for being able to share this conversational space with me and further for the listeners to be able to hear your voice and

the gifts and the knowledge that you're sharing with them too. It's going to be such a beautiful thing. So kih-chi maarsii so much.

LF: Thank you. Thank you so much for inviting me.