

# ARBOS AWARD

## DEREK HYLAND'S STORY

### ARBOS FOR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTIONS TO EDUCATION AND THE TEACHING PROFESSION



Derek earned his bachelor of education at the University of Saskatchewan in 2009. He taught in Saskatoon for a year before moving to Lloydminster, where he had done his internship. He worked as a Grade 7 teacher, then a targeted skills teacher, supporting students with challenging behaviours, and

then as a Grade 8 teacher, where he worked with Elders to use more holistic, Indigenous teaching approaches. Throughout his career he has also led outdoor education and leadership clubs.

Through his involvement in reconciliation activities, Derek learned of the low graduation rates among Indigenous students. He and a colleague collaborated with the Lloydminster Native Friendship Centre and First Nations Elders to create a program for youth focused on rites of passage with the goal to improve graduation rates. Then in 2018, after further consultation with Elders and Knowledge Keepers, he started the Land-Based Cultural Leadership Program for students interested in hands-on, outdoor education, learning Cree and Indigenous cultural and land-based practices. The LBCLP attracts not only Indigenous students but also newcomers and students seeking an alternative to the regular classroom setting.

Derek plans his lessons seasonally, according to teachings from Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and no week is the same. One day the class could be dissecting a coyote to learn about body systems, the next they could be telling stories around a campfire, and the day after that they might be learning canoeing skills at a swimming pool. The program integrates the Grade 8 curriculum in a holistic way that tries to make learning more engaging.

The LBCLP students are leaders in the school and community. They have made recommendations to city council on how to improve water quality. They

are mentors to younger students. They lead blanket activities and participate in the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls activities, and volunteer at local powwows and other events.

Derek's commitment to outdoor education and reconciliation goes well beyond the classroom. He serves on the board of SaskOutdoors. He helped create the Prairie Thunder Boys drum group in the Lloydminster Public School Division. He is a member of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation's Supporting Indigenous Ways of Knowing in Mathematics Working Committee. A husband and father of three, Derek also performs in community theatre and co-leads a local Scout troop.

## A CONVERSATION WITH DEREK HYLAND

### What do you love most about being a teacher?

I don't know that there are too many other careers where you can bring in so much of who you are, like your hobbies and your interests, to work with youth, whether through extracurricular clubs or directly in the classroom. I think that's so awesome! I take my Grade 8s camping. We go snaring. We smoke meat. We go canoeing. We tan hides. I have many random hobbies, so being able to integrate all those things into my work is pretty cool.

I really like that I get to reset every year. Some years it's great, and sometimes not great. It's hard to leave a group every single year, but every year you get that new beginning and it's a new chance to reinvent how you want to do things and it's a fresh start. It's cool to have that renewal.

I also really appreciate the energy of Grade 8 students. It's a different vibe and ridiculousness that they bring to the classroom.

### Tell me about someone who has helped shape your life and leadership approach?

I've had so many great teachers and mentors who have shaped who I am and how I teach. During my time in Saskatoon, I learned a lot from Mark Wilderman, Chris Clark, Gillian Edlund and Ian Wilson; they're all amazing educators who kind of started me where I'm going and supported me along the way. My wife is an amazing teacher, and she has always been a huge part of my teaching. She always helps me take the ridiculous things that I come up with and make them more focused. As I've worked to incorporate Land-Based Learning and Indigenous Ways of Knowing into my practice, Sandy and Clint Chocan have really helped move me along in my understanding and they've been instrumental to me personally. I've been so lucky to connect with amazing mentors who just happened to come my way.

### What impact have your colleagues and students made on your life?

There are countless impacts. I think being a teacher is a weird job in that you're going to share your life with these 30 or so kids for 10 months and then send them off and then do the same the next year with another group of kids. I see my Grade 8 students more often than I see my own children sometimes. Every day a kid teaches me something new, whether it's a random fact, a way to approach life or a different perspective on something.

I've also had administrators who have really pushed me to trust what I want to do and who have given me a long leash to try new things. That's been really big too, because I've had the trust of my administration to try new things. I would never have been able to do the crazy things I've done without administrators who encouraged me, backed me up and believed in me along the way.

### If you could give a new teacher advice, what would it be?

Surround yourself with good people. Find mentors. I only teach in the way that I teach because of the mentors that I've had. I was blessed with a lot of great teachers growing up, so I saw lots of good examples of teaching, and outside-of-the-box teaching. Once you become a teacher it's easy to get in your own zone or get stressed out. So, whether it's finding a professional growth network, or connecting through the world of X (Twitter) into a small zone of supportive people or within your school or your division, finding some really good people who push you and ask you the hard questions while also being supportive is really important.

### What is one valuable lesson being an educator has taught you?

I think that I've learned not only patience but also the importance of trying to understand before you are trying to be understood. It's approaching people through a curious lens, trying to understand where people are coming from. It's a little bit of Ted Lasso coming out perhaps but being curious about people is so important. Especially right now in the world, it's so important to try to understand each other. That's something that I didn't understand the importance of until I spent time as an educator.



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