

SIDES Professional Book Club  
Year End Report  
Submitted by Holly Mair

Our professional book club studied three titles this year:

- *The War for Kindness* by Jamil Zaki
- *Dare to Lead* by Brené Brown
- *Wayi Wah!* By Jo Chrona

We met as a group to discuss the books and we noticed that all three choices were connected through the central messages to be open-hearted, curious and empathetic. We also discussed how some participants would prefer an audio book next year and wondered about that possibility.

Specific feedback for each book includes:

### **The War for Kindness**

This book is dense with examples, which elicited mixed reactions from our group; some readers appreciated the richness of examples, while others felt there were too many. Despite this, the book offered valuable advice, with the best message being that empathy can be cultivated if one desires to do so. However, the academic tone and clinical approach of the book posed challenges for some readers. Although the central message that empathy can be built was clear, readers expressed a desire for more explicit strategies to achieve this.

The chapter that resonated with us the most was Chapter 7, titled "The Digital Double Edge," which addresses the creation of empathy in online communities. This chapter is particularly relevant to our work at SIDES and aligns with our efforts this year. A key quote that stood out to us was: "Those of us in power have a responsibility not only to be kind but also to create ecosystems in which kindness is expected and rewarded." This emphasizes the importance of fostering environments where kindness is both encouraged and recognized.

### **Dare to Lead**

Our conversation on *Dare to Lead* focused extensively on the concepts of armored leadership versus daring leadership, emphasizing the need to transition to the latter. We appreciated the idea of "rumbling with vulnerability" and recognized its value in the workplace. However, we noted the importance of approaching vulnerability with clear boundaries, agreeing that over-sharing can lead to discomfort. We unanimously felt that fostering a willingness to discuss difficult issues can create an environment conducive to a growth mindset. Readers enjoyed Brené Brown's tone and humor, with several members planning to purchase the workbook for further exploration of these concepts. The quote that resonated most with us was: "Leaders must either invest a reasonable amount of time attending to fears and feelings, or squander an unreasonable amount of time trying to manage ineffective and unproductive behavior" (Brené Brown, 2018, p. 70).

**Title: Wayi Wah!**

We found *Wayi Wah!* to be highly accessible, easy to read, and practical, particularly because it was written by an educator. Many participants engaged with the reflection questions at the end of each chapter and planned personal growth strategies in Indigenous education based on the suggestions provided. We appreciated that these sections were tailored to different roles within the school, making the advice highly relevant.

Our discussion highlighted the notion that the act of selecting educational materials can be a form of colonialism. For instance, when a non-Indigenous teacher chooses between two Indigenous picture books, it is crucial to consider how to make a respectful choice that does not inadvertently prioritize one aspect of a culture over another. We also reflected on the message in the book of ownership. We need to start re-examining our thinking on who owns Indigenous educational content.

We also revisited the concept of epistemic racism, which Jo Chrona discussed at our Indigenous Pro-D Day two years ago. This idea feels particularly relevant as we explore how to incorporate Traditional Ecological Knowledge, Traditional Story, and Oral History into high school courses authentically, rather than as mere interesting facts.

Lastly, the BC First Peoples Principles of Learning were a significant focus for us. One member shared their experience of spending a full day at a FNESC workshop delving into these principles, using Jo's blog as a reference. The reminder of the principles' purpose and meaning was valuable. Many members of our book club were also at the DL conference in April and were also able to use the messages in the book to extend the learning from the conference. Specifically, we appreciated Jo's recognition at the DL conference that relational learning might pertain to the relationship between student and teacher in an asynchronous, continuous entry distance learning context.