

2016

A Room Full of Stories  
Conference

Mumbai, India

# [RESPONSES FROM MUMBAI- A ROOM FULL OF STORIES TO PEN PAL PROJECT]

October 13/14, 2016 participants of the workshop Linking Lives: Narrative Practices with Groups & Communities held in Mumbai India crafted responses after witnessing video of the community initiative called the Pen Pal Project from Canada. This project was started to foster relations between First Nations and Canadian children following conflict related to land rights.



Dear Pen Pals,

First of all, such a big thank you for sharing your journey with us all the way here in India. I wonder if you even thought that your story would touch so many hearts across the globe.

It was so amazing to me to see how you bridged your friendship, and shared your lives, your hopes, your dreams, through letters with each other. Did you imagine that you would grow such beautiful friendships? I think if we also started to share our lives with people we think are 'different' we could also build great relationships. Perhaps in a country like India where there is so much internal conflict over religion, land, water, resources, race, we could learn to open our hearts to one another. Perhaps we could be friends with Pakistan one day!

You have given me hope. You have showed me that something beautiful can come out of a small gesture even if I don't know how it is going to be. And so you have given me the courage to work to open hearts.

For that my son and I thank you!

I hope I can visit you all someday,

Love L.

*To The Pen Pals,*

*The journey of hearing and seeing and experiencing the pen pal project was awesome. A small seed of from young children can grow into a big tree of peace. Penning down your dreams, hopes, achievements, failures, struggles, tests, girlfriends, boyfriends, teachers, family members is such a great way of sharing. You will and are the great Ambassadors of the language of communication.*

*R.*

*I take back with me a promise not to forget the images of the children from 2 communities who taught the adults what is possible if you look for a moment through the 'eyes of another'.*

*Thank You!*

*Dear Six Nations/ Caledonia Pen Pals,*

*Your story is more relevant to us in India, and I suspect all over the world, than you can imagine. The image of 2 kids from supposedly 'enemy' communities, with arms around each other, enjoying each other's company is a symbol of hope! Hearing the adults thank the children for lessons they have taught them particularly resonated for me because in my personal and professional life I have learned so much more from children than adults.*

*To the Six Nations, Caledonia Pen Pal Project,*



*I have over the last two days heard quite a bit about the work you have been doing together over the past 10 years. It is really inspiring to know that “coming together” exchanging tellings of cultural stories can be so effective - that we people can be moved. I work in Denmark and Nepal where we/I often are in the midst of the same kinds of issues you all faced and I guess you still face. I want you to know that I bring the work you have done with me to these communities - I will tell them about how you have all built a bridge- that things/meetings are possible! Your story gives me energy and renewed passion for my work life.*

*Thank You*

*R.*

*Pen Pals,*

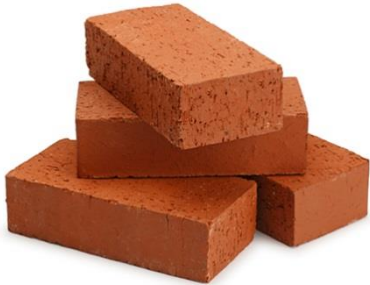
*What moved me is a small activity of writing letters to a pal between Six Nations and Caledonia school children brought about such a huge impact over the years and that it has become a big event for the members.*

*Since I always believe in positivity and optimism and have a lot of hope that change will take place - this story makes great sense to me. I also believe that these kids are our future leaders and if a seed of love is sowed in them it will definitely continue in their lives.*

*This story has brought optimism and hope to me that I can bring about a change - a collective document for the community I work with which is parents with children of developmental disabilities.*

*Thank You  
H.*

Dear young and enthusiastic people of Six Nations and Caledonia and the Pen Pal community,



Watching you guys engage in sharing affections, peace, love and friendship was a touching experience. Many times we add bricks to the walls, without being aware of why those walls exist. We get comfortable within those walls, thickening it with bricks and stories that separate us and make us hate those on the other sides of the walls. We forget that other stories do exist or can be created; the wall can be broken, with love, peace and friendship. It may take years for your initiatives to bring a concrete change or completely destroy the wall, but it will be a success story for sure.

*Dear children from Six Nations and Caledonia,*

*I guess you do not know and I will ever know how much you have achieved. For sure you give to us what we now, with age, are unable to imitate but need and happy to follow. And the very big thing I learned while I cannot put into words here and now- one little bit stood out. Broadcasting ones identity wills a new story and is recreating oneself.*

*A*

*For the Six Nations/ Caledonia Pen Pals*

*Congratulations firstly for the ongoing success of this beautiful heartwarming project. Seeing your video and pictures was inspiring and really made me believe that having a world without barriers and discrimination is possible!*

*We have so much to learn, share, accept, adopt, and rejoice with each other if we allow ourselves to celebrate differences and seek out the similarities.*

*May your projects light and wisdom travel all*



*It was great to listen to the stories, the gatherings, about Pen Pals, etc. I was drawn towards the sustenance of the Pen Pal Program and the difference that it made on both sides of the land (First Nations and Caledonia). It was interesting to know that how it started with one/two classes and spread across bridging the gap and the conflicts between the two sides of people.*

*It brings to my consciousness that people always have that goodness in them; it's just that what you sow in the minds. Also how important children can be in the transformation and to bring a change.*

*I specifically take with me the art. How art could be used to bring the minds of the people together and art, music and other forms of art can become an important part in transformation in the minds of people.*

*I am going to use the idea of this collective documentation, archiving into my practice, into my groups and communities to help people.*

*Dear Pen Pals,*

*I was speechless after seeing the video! Afterwards I felt emotional, touched and compassionate.*

*Such young children could do what we adults could not do. Even though we have years of life experience. It just re-affirmed my faith in love, harmony and peace.*

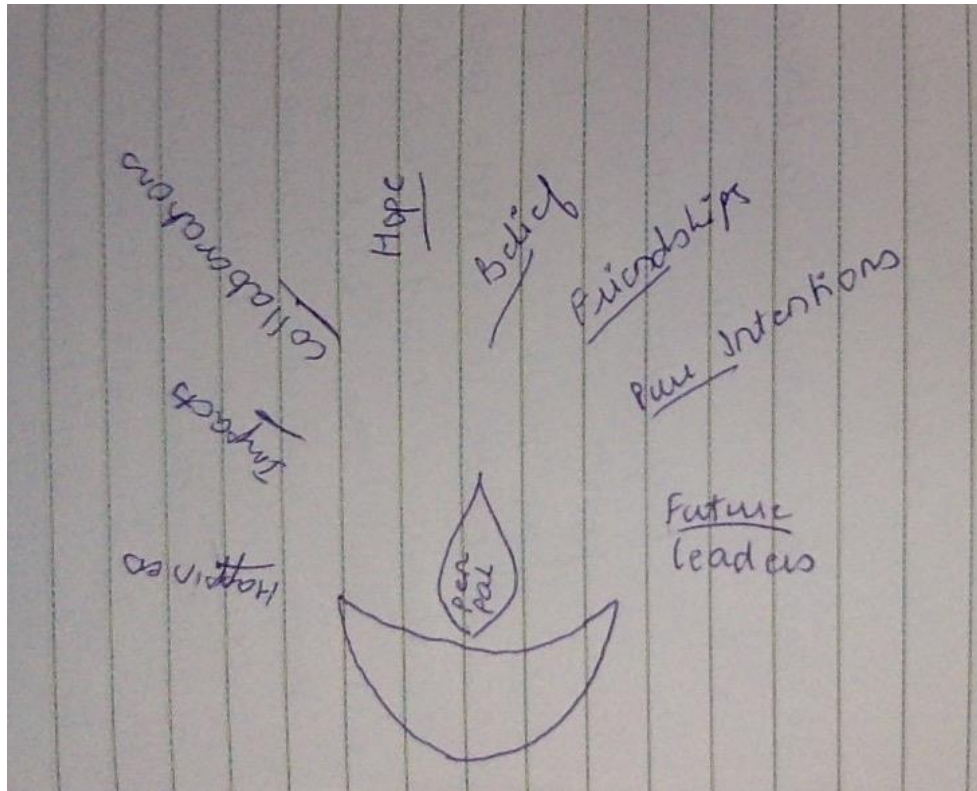
*Congratulations and a big big hug from India. I wish we adults can be like you, then this beautiful world would be heaven!*

*Once again all the very best in your endeavours.  
Fondly,*

*A*

To Pen Pals,

This is the image that I saw after the video

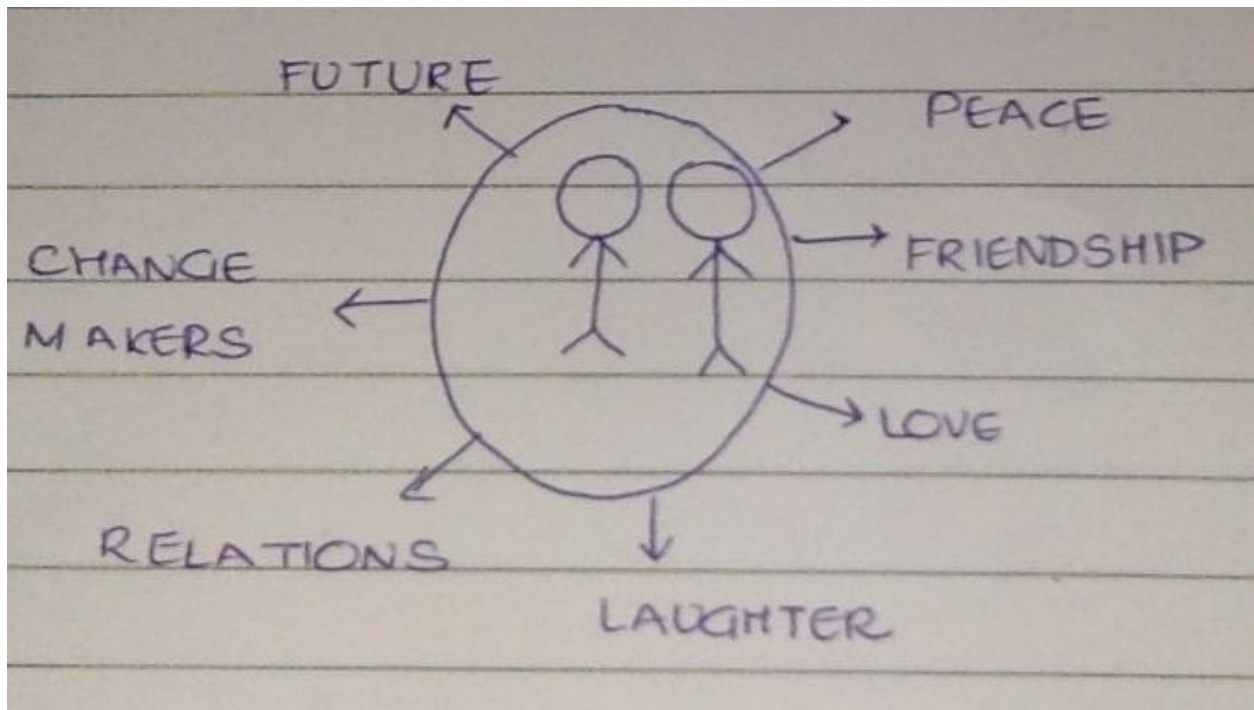
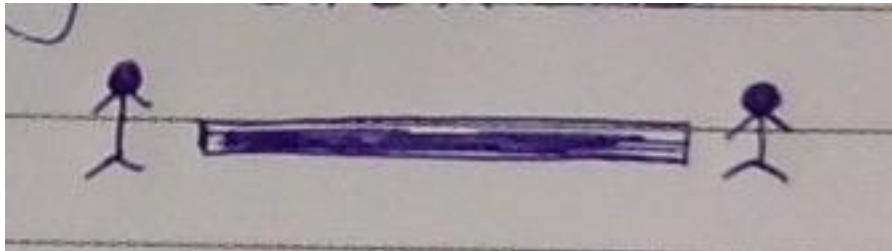


It is a small traditional lamp in India. This interprets that the efforts made by the Pen Pals - I would call the little agenb of change made which are like the 'wick' of the lamp which brought about the light in your entire community Fuel for the light- Hope, belief, collaboration.....

Thank You

Pen Pal Project,

Children connect communities through artwork.



“Children are an agent of change”

Exhibit the art work- let people know your work- build on your story - share



*For the Six Nations and Caledonia Communities,*

*Your story was truly and inspiring one especially because you re-defined your perceptions of each other and reached out beyond the 'individual' but to the collective.*

*I was particularly drawn to the fact that you started with young minds and ensured that they were not inhibited or prejudiced in any way.... they did not 'carry the baggage' of older generations. This uninhibited generous and interconnected journey through your pen pal project has inspired me to act with the tribal communities I work with borrowing from some of your ideas.*

*What resonates with me personally is that through my experience of work with Tribal Communities from India, I see common areas of conflict - however your having demonstrated that separating the 'actor from the action' can be done through dialogue and acceptance.*

*I wish you all the success going ahead. I would like to share a thought from the Buddhist Philosophy which I practice- "Don't let the past deplete the bucket of potential we hold... now is the only time we have! Hold on to the moment!"*

*R.*

Dear Pen Pals,

*I was shown the video on the different pen pal activities that have emerged over the years and it really helped me to affirm my conviction that change can happen- nothing is impossible if we put our hearts to it.*

*I work with differently abled adults in Mumbai and seeing your video, I got an idea to start a pen pal system between school children and differently abled children/individuals. I could see how over the years your pen pal system has grown and that gives me hope that maybe my project may start small but will eventually move into a community project.*

*SO, thank you for sharing your stories and inspiring me to contribute something positive towards the community of differently abled individuals.*

*Good Luck,*

*A.*

*To all the stakeholders in the Pen Pal Project*

*Your project has validated my belief in the concept of “children being effective agents of change”, as effective as grown-ups or adults.*

*Your journey is an inspirational one. It tells me how working together from a very early age and persevering for longer duration does bring out a positive change. Childhood friendships strengthen and transform you into more sensitive and tolerant adults... and the world needs more of that!!*

*I have worked with adults in the community. Your work has given me the confidence that children are quite capable as well. They are equally cognizant and their innocence teaches us a lot. Continue your good work! Continue inspiring us all!*

*All my good wishes!!!*

*Yours sincerely,*

*A*



*The most significant part was how a small step towards building alternate story turned into a big movement. Even though the problem was big, a small step taken by children in one small part of the school rippled and affected so many people....*

*I am drawn towards a Hindi proverb, “Boond boond se ghat bharta hai” which means small droplets of water fill the pot. Small efforts here and there build up an alternate story and help fight for the cause.*

*Sometimes I feel helpless because the enormity of social problems but this story denoted that even smallest of efforts taken makes a difference.*

*Dear Six Nations and Caledonia Pen Pals,*

*Something that really stood out was the coming together of people for the sake of preserving relationships for the future generations. What started from one room got people from all walks of life to make it a very visible and significant moment. The fact that it started with children brought in hope, innocence and freshness to a battle between two communities.*

*A strong image it evokes for me is of the river itself that starts from a tributary and widens, stretches, and touches lives as it moves on. What resonates is the experience of getting to know people and reaching out at a very young age to people beyond ones immediate community.*

*A powerful take away from this story is that one has to have the courage to start a movement, one may be alone, there may be no support, one may start really small but with courage and faith it will bear fruit and a huge moment may take off.*

Dear Six Nations and Caledonia,

Today I have heard about your pen pal program that has been growing over many years. What started with two classes has truly rippled out to reach further than you might have imagined. I am from Australia and I will share your story with people there who can learn about your Two Row Wampum and the meaning of friendship and may develop their own images of significance.

In Australia we also have people who don't understand each others culture and whose lives could be enriched in similar ways to yours. In viewing videos and seeing images of your experiences I have been impressed by the sense of love and joy and connection that goes beyond the color of skin. Thank you for reminding me that love and joy can triumph. The warmth and smiling faces and union are testimony to your success. I may be in touch in the future for advice and wisdom.

Thank You,  
S.



*Dear Pen Pals,*

*It was heartwarming to see the video of your experience. The smile on your faces is something we will hold on to. It has got us thinking about how we can do something similar with our children experiencing disability. We could use this as a way to connect them with other children. It will help bridge the gap and dissolve some of the differences that create difficulties for them.*

*With respect,*

*J., D., J., S.*

*Dear Six Nations and Caledonia,*



*What hearing your story did for me was to remind me of where I came from and where I want to go. Watching intergenerational fun, games, art, music and dance made me miss the sense of belonging to a community. I had an image of strength and perpetuity- the struggle will be tackled by all working together; a harmony as experienced in nature.*

*I will take with me the image of the Two Row Wampum- the simplicity of design and agreement behind it spread over 400 years is awesome. Keep it simple and we shall overcome through peace and love.*

*With love from the UK*





*Dear Residents of Caledonia and Six Nations,*

*What a journey you have been through and continue to be on. What is amazing is how you let your children show you the way where there seemed no light. And even more inspiring to see how that little light has become a beacon of hope for so many communities and now has crossed oceans and has reached us all the way in Mumbai, India.*

*When I think of you and your children and the Pen Pal Project I think of the brightest blue skies that stand eternal behind the passing clouds. My country is torn by many internal divisions which we look for answers. I know for sure that the seeds need to be sown through our children. The prejudices run deep, but they have yet to reach our future generations. I believe it is our duty to see that they never do!*

*Thanks for sowing this seed of a thought! May peace and unity be yours always!*

*P.*



*Dear Pen Pals, Suzie Miller, and all the people of Six Nations and Caledonia,*

*It was a truly wonderful experience listening to and watching the ten year story of the Pen Pals Project unfold. It reaffirmed my belief that children have tremendous potential to make a difference. Kudos to Suzie for recognizing this potential and supporting the endeavor. I loved all the different activities which engaged the people - the friendship belts, selfie booth, and art blanket. Keep up the awesome work. You inspire us to make things happen.*

*Love,*

*A.*

*Dear Lovely people of Six Nations and Caledonia,*

*What really struck me is how this program grew from a small initiative to this huge movement. The word that came to mind after witnessing your journey is*

## **POSSIBILITIES**

*and the image is that of a small seed of hope being planted amidst conflict and how with everyone's courage and determination this seed is growing into huge tree that is stronger and resistant to forthcoming conflicts.*

*My hope is that this tree blossoms in the years to come by and that you continue to spread the message of love , peace and friendship far and wide “like the wind”.*

*The message I take with me is that small ripples can create big waves, and that what seemed impossible before is possible if you try. Your journey is ‘extraordinary’, it gives hope to many people and reinforces that we are all one if we focus on our similarities and respect and honour each other’s differences.*

*Thank you for sharing this experience with us and allowing us to witness your journey.*

