

Philosophical Inquiry in Education: Engaging with the TRC's Calls to Action



Edited by Thomas Falkenberg

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Faculty of Education
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This book is dedicated to all people of the Métis civilization of Canada
— Indigenous and non-Indigenous —
who have, through their way of living or their teachings,
paved the way toward the much needed reconciliation
for rebuilding, strengthening, and flourishing of Indigenous cultures,
for respecting and learning from our cultural differences,
and for acknowledging, drawing strength from, and building upon our common roots.

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Introduction

THOMAS FALKENBERG

The idea for this book arose from the Philosophy of Education course that I taught this year at the University of Manitoba and that the authors of the four chapters in this book attended as students. The chapters resulted from the final papers that the students wrote for the course. The course had three strands: one that looked at the practice of philosophizing as a way of life; one that looked at forms of philosophical inquiry as research methods; and one that engaged students with some core issues philosophers of education have written about. The activities and readings across the three strands drew not only on scholars from the Western traditions, but also from Eastern Wisdom and from Indigenous traditions.

About three-quarters through the course, a unique opportunity emerged. Two colleagues of mine, Frank Deer and Melanie Janzen, have been driving our Faculty's efforts to develop an Indigenous initial teacher education program. As part of these efforts, they organized a lecture by Justice Murray Sinclair, who headed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), which just recently released its final report (TRC, 2016a), an Executive Summary of the report (TRC, 2015a), and a separate document with the TRC's 94 calls to action (TRC, 2015b). As it happened, the lecture fell on a Tuesday evening, which was our course night. With the consent of all students, we decided to go to the lecture as part of the course work. Because of their interests, some students chose for their writing assignments to focus on issues linked to Indigenous education, so the attending of the lecture provided a very fitting complement. With this in mind and the Sinclair lecture ahead of us, I offered those in the class that were interested in it the opportunity to engage with the TRC's (2015b) *Calls to Action* for their final course assignment and to then make the collection of that work public through an e-book. We intended the book publication as a step by non-Indigenous educators toward reconciliation in the spirit of the TRC's report:

To the Commission, "reconciliation" is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. In order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour. (TRC, 2015a, pp. 6-7)

While not all students who were initially interested in contributing to the collection were able to commit the time required for such a project, in the end, four students were able to do so. They used philosophical inquiry into concepts and ideas linked to some of the TRC's calls to action and into assumptions that an understanding and implementation of these calls have to confront. Their work is a serious and thoughtful engagement by non-Indigenous educators in Manitoba with the TRC's calls to action in an effort to contribute to the needed discourse on and actions for reconciliation.



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In the remainder of this introduction to the book project in general and to their work in particular, I will discuss three themes the authors of the four subsequent chapters engage with. I partially do so in order to create somewhat of a structural and argumentative connection between the four chapters, and partially to share my own perspective on those specific themes – as my own contribution to this book’s step toward reconciliation.

The Ethically Ambiguous Potential of School Education

The first theme is the ethically ambiguous potential of school education. We might assume that schooling, as organized and society-run socialization and enculturation of children and youth, would be undertaken in the best interest of the students. But what if society at large considers the interests of children from certain communities to be quite different from what those communities see as their children’s interests? In the extreme, you have a case of cultural genocide (e.g., Davidson, 2012).

Cultural genocide is the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group. Land is seized, and populations are forcibly transferred and their movement is restricted. Languages are banned. Spiritual leaders are persecuted, spiritual practices are forbidden, and objects of spiritual value are confiscated and destroyed. And, most significantly to the issue at hand, families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next.

In its dealing with Aboriginal people, Canada did all these things.
(TRC, 2015a, p. 1)

This cultural genocide manifested itself in different ways, but most profoundly in the daily experiences of Indigenous children (TRC, 2016b). Of those who survived the Residential School System, “many students left the school filled with self-loathing and loathing of their own family and community. They also often left with a profound distrust of education” (TRC, 2016b, p. 66).

The history of schooling in Canada has its dark sides. The more it needs to be appreciated by non-Indigenous Canadians that the TRC calls for education, including and in particular school education, to play a central role in the reconciliation process and the vision of thriving Indigenous cultures in Canada (TRC, 2015b, pp. 1-2, 7-8). This, however, will have to be done with great care for and sensitivity toward the historical and intergenerational trauma linked to school education in Canada and the self-declared interests of Indigenous peoples. The chapters in this book are written by non-Indigenous educators who believe in the potential of school education as an important means for such a careful and sensitive reconciliation process and in supporting and developing thriving Indigenous cultures and communities. As the TRC calls for particular actions in school education, so do the authors of the chapters consider from their respective perspective what needs to change in school education for reconciliation.

Boyd (Chapter 1) suggests that non-Indigenous Canadians need to revisit their view of the role of secularism in public schools. In his contribution, he inquires into cultural biases that are hidden in assumptions behind the claim of a spirituality-free public school system in Canada, assumptions that hide a cultural dominance over Indigenous spirituality-rich cultures. He argues that we need to unpack these hidden assumptions if we want to have a chance for a reconciliation process as suggested by the TRC.

Draper (Chapter 2) suggests in her contribution that we cannot continue using a Western conceptualization of student success to assess the school success of Indigenous students. If we continue aiming for and measuring the achievement toward a culturally inappropriate educational goal for Indigenous students, Draper argues, we continue with what Battiste (2000) has called “cognitive imperialism” (p. 198).

Pagtakhan (Chapter 3) suggests that our understanding of inclusive education needs to encompass measures to adequately include Indigenous students and, therefore, Indigenous perspectives in schooling. She argues that our legislated and legislative commitment to inclusive education needs to expand to include an adequate consideration of the needs of Indigenous students.

In his chapter, Reimer (Chapter 4) links his interest in storytelling and stories as a means of understanding with Indigenous traditions of storytelling and the role of stories in Indigenous cultures. He argues “that the healing quality of story cannot be ignored” (this volume, p. 53) and demonstrates through his own stories how the educative “quality of story” can be used as part of the reconciliation process.

Framing School Education: Understanding Canada as a Métis Civilization

Canada is first and foremost bi-cultural, made up of two cultural meta-groups: Indigenous and non-Indigenous (settler) peoples. Any other cultural classification is a sub-classification of this bi-culturalism, including the understanding of Canada as a bi-lingual country and as a multi-cultural society, both of which are features of the settler strand of Canada’s bi-culturalism. Historically, this seems to have been the understanding of living in what later became Canada when Europeans started to settle in the lands that Indigenous peoples already occupied.

Aboriginal peoples have always remembered the original relationship they had with early Canadians. That relationship of mutual support, respect, and assistance was confirmed by the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and the Treaties with the Crown that were negotiated in good faith by their leaders. That memory, confirmed by historical analysis and passed down through Indigenous oral histories, has sustained Aboriginal peoples in their long political struggle to live with dignity as self-determining peoples with their own cultures, laws, and connections to the land. (TRC, 2015a, p. 184)

At a time of the immediate need to survive the winters and the wilderness and of resource exploitation of the lands (e.g. the fur trade), the settlers collaborated with Indigenous peoples, formed unions at the political level and intermarried at the person level (e.g., Saul, 2008). This initial phase of forming a “Métis civilization” (Saul, 2008) shifted to cultural genocide (Chrisjohn & Young, 2006; Milloy, 1999; TRC, 2015a, 1-3), once more and more settlers were brought over from Europe and much more formal structures of governance were sought – with a European identity that included a sense of racial superiority prominent among the settlers (Daschuk, 2013; Saul, 2008). With the TRC’s report (TRC, 2016a), we are just beginning to move out of this phase of cultural genocide and the intergenerational trauma for Indigenous people (TRC, 2015a). The important and challenging question is now: Into what direction are we to move? The most promising answer to this question is the path toward reconciliation outlined in the TRC’s report and its 96 calls for action. I encounter teacher educator colleagues and school teachers who do not see why “Indigenous cultures” should receive privileged consideration in school and university education over other

cultures in our “multicultural society”. Until we non-Indigenous Canadians have learned to understand ourselves as a Métis civilization, this path toward reconciliation will face very challenging obstacles.

While to my knowledge the TRC in its report does not speak explicitly of Canada as a “Métis civilization”, it does say that

all Canadian children and youth deserve to know Canada’s honest history, including what happened in the residential schools, and to appreciate the rich history and knowledge of Indigenous nations who continue to make such a strong contribution to Canada, including our very name and *collective identity as a country* [emphasis added]. For Canadians from all walks of life, *reconciliation offers a new way of living together* [emphasis added]. (TRC, 2015a, pp. 21-22)

This and other passages in the report, as well as particularly the calls to action in the section entitled “Reconciliation” (TRC, 2015b, pp. 4-5) provide a path toward a Canada with nation-to-nation relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples grounded in “renew[ed] and establish[ed] Treaty relationships based on principles of mutual recognition, mutual respect, and shared responsibility for maintaining those relationships into the future” (TRC, 2015b, p. 5). Constructive proposals toward reconciliation by non-Indigenous academics, e.g. Poelzer and Coates’s (2015) *From Treaty Peoples to Treaty Nation: A Road Map for All Canadians*, published just prior to the TRC’s report, develop visions for Canada very much aligned with the one outlined by the TRC: “Reconciliation is achievable. Canadians can become treaty peoples” (Poelzer & Coates, 2015, p. 279).

Boyd (Chapter 1) draws explicitly on Saul’s (2008) notion of Canada as a Métis civilization when making the case for re-conceptualizing the role of spirituality in Canadian school education. He argues that once we acknowledge that Canada is indeed a Métis civilization, we need and should be able to give Indigenous spirituality the place and recognition in Canadian society and Canadian schooling that it has the right to in a Métis civilization. Drawing on storytelling as Indigenous spiritual practice (e.g., Atleo, 2004; Kovach, 2009, chapter 5), Reimer (Chapter 4) argues and illustrates the importance of such spiritual practice for the reconciliation process. The TRC’s claim that “reconciliation cannot occur without listening, contemplation, meditation, and deeper internal deliberation” (TRC, 2015a, p. 18), aligns very well with Reimer’s view of the important role of stories and storytelling in the reconciliation process, but also in the developing and fostering of empathy needed in a Métis civilization. The notion of Canada as a Métis civilization frames also the arguments in Draper’s and Pagtakhan’s chapters. Draper’s (Chapter 2) argument for re-conceptualizing success of Indigenous students in the Canadian school system and Pagtakhan’s (Chapter 3) argument for including the needs of Indigenous students in inclusive education in Canadian schools find a strong framework in the notion of Canada as a Métis civilization.

Redefining Success for Indigenous Students

The TRC identifies the adoption and implementation of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* “as the framework for reconciliation” (TRC, 2015b, p. 4). The Declaration (United Nations, 2008) gives Indigenous peoples the right to “self-determination” (Article 3), the right to “autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs” (Article

4), and the right to “maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions” (Article 5), while at the same time “retaining their right to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State” (Article 5). If the historical argument for Canada as a Métis civilization can bear fruit for the reconciliation process, these rights have to be its cornerstone. But what is the reality in Canada for living these rights in light of the colonizing history in Canada and the cultural genocide particularly through the Residential Schools System?

In a recent panel presentation at the University of Manitoba, Marie Battiste made the point that “school success” for Indigenous students can have negative impacts on the Indigenous communities the students are from. To be successful in school as defined by the dominant view of school success means for many Indigenous students that they have to leave their home community to attend (further) schooling. This initial move then leads often to them leaving the community for good to get a “successful” career elsewhere based on “successful” schooling. No community can sustain when the next generation is leaving. The situation leaves Indigenous communities in a dilemma: supporting their children to be “successful” means having to let them go from the community.

Furthermore, “being successful” as a student in Canada also means being enculturated into a Eurocentric worldview (Battiste, 2000; Battiste & Henderson, 2000, chapter 5), a case also made by Boyd (Chapter 1). As philosophers (e.g., Bauman, 2008; Taylor, 1991), psychologists (e.g., Fisher, 2002; Schwartz, 1994), ecologists (e.g., Orr, 1994), economists (e.g., Jackson, 2009; Schor, 2010), sociologists (e.g., Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 2008), and holistic and ecological education scholars (e.g., McKenzie, Hart, Bai, & Jickling, 2009; Sterling, 2001;) have argued, this Eurocentric worldview is dominated by an emphasis on individualism, destruction of the ecological foundation for humans and other life forms, and consumption-driven life practices. Battiste (2000) has called the formal and informal enculturation of Indigenous students into this worldview cognitive imperialism:

Cognitive imperialism is a form of cognitive manipulation used to disclaim other knowledge bases and value. Validated through one’s knowledge base and empowered through public education, it has been the means by which whole groups of people have been denied existence and have had their wealth confiscated. Cognitive imperialism denies people their language and cultural integrity by maintaining the legitimacy of only one language, one culture, and one frame of reference. (p. 198)

This is the reason why Battiste and others call for a decolonization of Canadian school education (e.g., Abdi, 2012; Battiste, 2013; Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003).

In this volume, Boyd and Draper explicitly take on the issue of cognitive imperialism in the Canadian school system and the need for its decolonization. Boyd (Chapter 1) takes on the issue of cognitive imperialism in the Canadian school system by unpacking the hidden dominance of a Christian-based worldview in the Canadian school system. Draper (Chapter 2) unpacks the hidden assumptions behind the dominant Eurocentric understanding of “student success” as it manifests itself in ministerial documents from Ontario and Manitoba. She demonstrates how this understanding is quite different from the one by Indigenous peoples. As argued above, this mismatch is to the disadvantage of Indigenous students, their communities, and the flourishing of Indigenous peoples’ cultures more generally. In her chapter, Pagtakhan (Chapter 3) argues that the philosophy and policy of inclusion should be used to frame the imperative of addressing the needs of

Indigenous students. If we look at Pagtakhan’s argument through a decolonization lens, we can say that the philosophy and policy of inclusion, rightly understood, provides an already available policy basis for the decolonization of the Canadian school system. Along those lines, Reimer’s (Chapter 4) argument for storytelling in education can serve as an argument for the role of storytelling in the decolonization process, which clearly has to be a strand of the reconciliation process as conceptualized in the TRC’s calls to action.

Conclusion

This book brings together four non-Indigenous educators who are concerned about reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. As educators, they focus in their chapters on the role and responsibility of school education and the school system for this reconciliation process as they engage with the recently published *Calls to Action* (TRC, 2015b). Their chapters bring three interconnected themes together that lead to the following larger picture.

Education, especially community organized school education, has the potential to be a force of good, but it has not always been used in this way. Theme 1 speaks to this “ethically ambiguous potential of school education”, which, together with Canada’s history of cultural genocide through the Residential Schools System, should keep us alert for the hidden dangers in school education.

School education is the organized means by communities, societies, and nations to pass on to the next generation its values and outlook on life. That means that a society has to have some sense of an identity. Theme 2 speaks to this question of identity; it speaks of a Canadian identity as a Métis civilization. If such an identity is grounded in the historical understanding and the mutual respect the TRC speaks of, then school education based on such an identity can (finally) be a force of good for non-Indigenous and Indigenous children.

As Commissioners, we believe that reconciliation is about respect. That includes both self-respect for Aboriginal people and mutual respect among all Canadians. All young people need to know who they are and from where they come. Aboriginal children and youth, searching for their own identities and places of belonging, need to know and take pride in their Indigenous roots. They need to know the answers to some very basic questions. Who are my people? What is our history? How are we unique? Where do I belong? Where is my homeland? What is my language and how does it connect me to my nation’s spiritual beliefs, cultural practices, and ways of being in the world? They also need to know why things are the way they are today. That requires an understanding of the history of colonization, including the residential school system and how it has affected their families, communities, their people, and themselves.

Of equal importance, non-Aboriginal children and youth need to comprehend how their own identities and family histories have been shaped by a version of Canadian history that has marginalized Aboriginal peoples’ history and experience. They need to know how notions of European superiority and Aboriginal inferiority have tainted mainstream society’s ideas about, and attitudes towards, Aboriginal peoples in ways that have been profoundly disrespectful and damaging. They too need to understand Canada’s history as a settler society and how assimilation policies have affected Aboriginal peoples. This knowledge and understanding will lay the groundwork for establishing mutually respectful relationships. (TRC, 2015a, p. 185)

Such an undertaking, however, requires that we have the appropriate goals for school education. If we aim for the wrong target, no good intentions will be helpful. Theme 3 speaks to probably the most important target of school education: student success. In a Métis civilization based on historical understanding and mutual respect, “student success” cannot be defined by solely drawing on the dominant group’s values and outlook on life.

Being dominant does not mean being wiser. In her argument for the decolonization of the Canadian school system, Battiste (2000) speaks of “the benefit that the Western world can derive from this [Indigenous] culture. Western scholars are gradually realizing how important Aboriginal knowledge may be to the future survival of our world” (p. 194). The critique of the Eurocentric worldview by non-Indigenous scholars referenced in the previous section supports very well this claim, even if most of these scholars do not explicitly draw on Indigenous knowledge (for exceptions, see Davis, 2009; Diamond, 2012). So, it might be worth re-conceptualizing the dominant notion of “student success” not just to meet the needs of Indigenous students but also to meet the (true) needs of non-Indigenous students.

For any such endeavour, however, Battiste’s (2000) warning needs to be heeded: “it is also important that they [Indigenous cultures] are recognized as the domain of Aboriginal peoples and not subverted by the dominant culture” (p. 194). Thus, any school education framed by the notion of Canada as a Métis civilization needs to be respectful of both roots of this civilization and grounded in the historical understanding of the damage done to its Indigenous root. Indigenous knowledge and heritage need to be protected (Battiste & Henderson, 2000) and for many re-discovered (e.g., Kovach, 2010). The TRC calls for the preservation, revitalization and strengthening of Indigenous languages and cultures (TRC, 2015b, p. 2), without which there can be no flourishing Métis civilization.

I see the chapter authors’ engagement with the TRC’s (2015b) *Call to Action* as a small but important step toward reconciliation as envisioned by the TRC. The authors demonstrate how important philosophical inquiring into educational policy and practice is for the reconciliation process, and they point to paths that Canadian school education and the Canadian public responsible for it could take toward reconciliation.

Reconciliation requires that a new vision, based on a commitment to mutual respect, be developed. It also requires an understanding that the most harmful impacts of residential schools have been the loss of pride and self-respect of Aboriginal people, and the lack of respect that non-Aboriginal people have been raised to have for their Aboriginal neighbours. Reconciliation is not an Aboriginal problem; it is a Canadian one. (TRC, 2015a, p. vi)

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Chapter 1

Secularism in Canadian Schools: A Response to the TRC's Calls to Action

PATRICK BOYD

As a non-Indigenous person I believe that we are at a crucial moment in the history of Canada. I believe that we have an opportunity to start the process of righting historical wrongs and improving the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. If we do not take this opportunity now, I fear that it may be our last chance. After having read through the 94 calls to action issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Committee of Canada (TRC, 2015a), I was struck by the breadth of scope they cover. From health to education to justice, they call for specific actions while also making a larger call to change a flawed national identity that is informed by a one-sided reading of our country's history. As an educator, I believe that despite the negative experience Indigenous people have had with the Canadian school system to date, education delivered with sensitivity and understanding still can, and needs to, be an important avenue in pursuing the reconciliation of our country. After all, reconciliation means restoring good relations between two sides. The Canadian education system is, undoubtedly, on one side of this story. Reconciliation will not be achieved if Canadian schooling is not part of the process. Therefore, I am inclined to look more closely at those of the 94 calls that make specific demands of the education system.

It is natural and important to consider what obstacles will stand in the way of successful implementation of these calls. We will not experience success if we cannot identify the factors that may lead to failure. There are many obstacles, both practical and theoretical, that will hinder the advancement of reconciliation. Secularism is one of those obstacles. There is a growing outcry against open displays of faith in Canadian life generally, and especially in public schools. This necessarily results in marginalization of those groups who feel their religion is with them at all times and that all life is an expression of faith. Many First Nations belief systems would fall under this description. Secularism is something that many people believe is fundamentally good, without having examined what it really means to be secular. We frequently hear statements that spirituality has no place in schools, but rarely hear anyone question whether that is true, whether it is even possible to take spirituality out of schools, or what is even meant by "spirituality". For the purposes of this paper I will use the term "spirituality" to refer to any system or collection of beliefs about the nature of existence beyond that which can be measured in the physical world. Additionally, I will argue that secularism has a cultural dimension. Therefore I will use "worldview" and "knowledge" interchangeably when discussing the dichotomy between Indigenous perspectives and Western perspectives.



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Whether we recognize it or not, religion plays a significant role in the lives of many, if not most, of the students in our schools. For this reason it is incredibly important that we examine the effect that the school system's attitude toward religion may be having on those students.

Secularism is a concept that has been in existence in Western civilization for many hundreds of years. It was an important aspect of Enlightenment thinking that allowed people to think and act outside of what was prescribed by the church. It may seem today that its meaning is simple and that when we discuss secular institutions, nations, or organizations that we are clearly all talking about the same thing: an absence of religion or of religious perspective (Smith, 2008). On closer inspection, however, secularism is much more complicated. Understanding the implications of a more complex view of secularism is essential in trying to understand the current state of secularism and its effect on students. Further to this, it is also important to understand the particular set of assumptions that accompanies Canadian secularism and how the assumptions relate to Indigenous students specifically.

As stated above there is a simple definition that secularism is the absence of a religious aspect. It is an arena with no spirituality of any kind. This probably most common way to define secularism purports that secularism is not a system of belief, or a structure for understanding the world and that it is separate from all such systems. The idea behind this understanding is that religious people can participate in public life, but that they can and should leave their religion at home. According to those believing in such secularism, it should, and does, reign in the public sphere (Smith, 2008). There are two different perspectives within this definition of secularism that attempt to explain how it should relate to religion generally. One is that secularism is seen as beneficial to all religions because if religion is irrelevant to public life then public institutions cannot be biased based on religion. Secularism in shared institutions makes them tolerant and accepting of all faiths, because they acknowledge none (Brown, 2012). The second perspective is that secularism is openly hostile toward religion. This view essentially sees religion as a problem that secularism can and should solve (Keane, 2000). For decades the Canadian residential and public school systems have been treating Indigenous faiths in just this way. This of course was perpetrated openly by the heavy hand of the Canadian government and the Roman Catholic, Anglican, United, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches (TRC, 2015b). Today, the school system resists Indigenous teachings in a much more subtle way: a strict adherence to secularism that constitutes the exclusion of a variety of world views.

Secularism manifests itself in many ways in Canadian public schools, but only a small number are noticed or discussed. Overt religious symbols are taken down and there is a push for a shift in language ("Christmas break" becomes "winter break", etc.), so that students with diverse religious backgrounds will feel welcome. This type of secularism dominates in schools to the point that religion verges on a taboo topic in the name of inclusion. For this paper I will identify the hidden assumptions upon which this kind of secularist thinking pivots, why it is problematic to make these assumptions, and how these assumptions may present obstacles to the implementation of the TRC's calls to action. The first assumption is that the current Canadian school system is secular. The second is the assumption that a truly secular or a-spiritual model of education is inclusive of students of all spiritual backgrounds because it is a neutral place that accepts all beliefs. The third assumption is that secularism is culturally neutral, and therefore contains none of the biases associated with cultural perspectives. For this reason it is assumed that a secular school system is the best fit for a multicultural nation. Following this I will offer justification for why Indigenous spirituality deserves extraordinary inclusion in the Canadian school system. Finally, I will argue that Canada is a Métis Nation, and I will include a vision of what a school system that includes both Indigenous spiritual knowledge and Western knowledge might look like.

Assumptions

Assumption 1: The Current School System Is Secular

The reality is that the Canadian school system was created in a Western European, and therefore a Christian, model. The traditional forms of authority, both moral and institutional, derive unofficially from a Christian perspective. This can be seen at the student level through the emphasis on individual rights and responsibilities over collective interests. It manifests itself at the classroom level through signed class contracts that focus students' sense of right and wrong on a Western style, written legal system. Considering the history of the treaty relationship in Canada, it is easy to understand why an indigenous person might not trust a contract that he or she has been asked to sign by a representative of the colonial government! Western political values are also engrained in the system much farther up the hierarchy and can be seen in the fact that we elect school board members and ultimately the ministers who make decisions about education generally. The mere fact that such a clear hierarchy exists is evidence of the dominance of a Christian worldview.

The Manitoba curriculum gives preference to all things Christian in history, literature and science. Students learn about Charlemagne in history class, but almost certainly hear nothing about Mensa Musa. Newton's laws are an essential part of classes at many ages, but despite the fact that students will interact with the algebra concepts laid out by Al-Kwarizmi, it is unlikely that they will ever hear his name or learn about his origin. It is likely any student graduating from a Canadian high school will have heard the name Martin Luther, but they are unlikely to have been exposed to Confucius. Most tellingly, especially when considering the recent Harper government's treatment of the anniversary as a vehicle to promote patriotism and pride in Canadian militarism, the War of 1812 will be studied by nearly all Canadian students. They will spend time talking about how a proud pre-Canadian army fought off the Americans and fed a nascent nationalism that ultimately grew into the drive that would birth our country less than sixty years later. Students may hear something of Tecumseh and the defeat of his confederacy. They may learn a little about other effects the war had on Indigenous people, but these will be mentioned as an aside. They are an add-on to the real story of history, which is the European one. While the truth is, that in the war 1812, no territory changed hands between the British and Americans. From a European perspective the War of 1812 has to be severely exaggerated to be anything but a skirmish on the outskirts of the Napoleonic Wars (Abel, 2012). However, the largest loss of life was felt by Indigenous people. The First Nations were left with few allies in North America following the war, and this was catastrophic to their continued recognition by growing European-style nations. This perspective is essential and it is missing from the story of Canada that we are presently telling in schools.

Another factor ignored in this assumption is that the vast majority of teachers in Canada are of European descent (Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009) and therefore, whether they are practicing Christians or not, they were raised in the Christian tradition. This assures that, unofficially, the morals and values that are passed from educators to students as 'Canadian' are in fact thinly veiled Christian beliefs. Indigenous people are not proportionately represented in the population of teachers, and therefore Indigenous values are not passed to students in the same informal way as Western values. It does not matter how religiously unaffiliated the institution declares itself to be, the individuals who belong to the institution still bring firmly held beliefs and biases with them every day. It is not difficult to see that white Christian students, and in fact non-religious students of European descent, will see their values and worldviews reflected in the school to a much greater

degree than Indigenous students. This will lead to a clear delineation between us, the dominant culture, and them, everyone else. The Canadian school system does not lack religious affiliation. It lacks the willingness to say it has religious affiliation. “Secularism cannot govern religions and subjects without stipulating their form and content, and this stipulation necessarily emerges from within particular religious histories and predicaments” (Brown, 2012). This is a somewhat pernicious problem because if a school system can claim that it has religious neutrality, while maintaining the structure and tradition of its religious roots, then it becomes very difficult for individuals in the system to express or defend their own differing beliefs. It promotes the continued dominance of the present ways of thinking and the present power structures. This is an obstacle to the implementation of the TRC’s call to action number 48. ii.:

Respecting Indigenous peoples’ right to self-determination in spiritual matters, including the right to practise, develop, and teach their own spiritual and religious traditions, customs, and ceremonies, consistent with Article 12:1 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. (TRC, 2015a, p. 5)

As outlined above, secularism, by its very nature, resists the inclusion of spiritual beliefs in public institutions such as schools by claiming to be neutral. In light of the arguments outlined above the assumption that the present school system is secular, and therefore spiritually neutral, while maintaining its Christian roots is problematic because it excludes students with differing spiritual backgrounds. The neutrality argument will undoubtedly be used in an attempt to keep Indigenous traditional beliefs out of schools. Thereby promoting the continuation of the Western dominated status quo.

Assumption 2: Secularism Is Equally Inclusive of all Students

It is assumed that it is just as possible for a Buddhist or a Muslim to participate in secular life as it is for a Christian. This assumption ignores the fact that secularism is a uniquely Western and therefore Christian concept (Brown, 2012). The emphasis on individual assessment and achievement over the good of the larger group, as well as placing an inflated value on work ethic show the Christian, and particularly Protestant, roots of the Canadian education system. However, the pretense of neutrality perpetrated by secularism causes these roots to be hidden. The rise of secularism and its long bloody history changed Christianity, so that a separation of church and state was made possible, but in many cases the separation of church and state results in little more than masking Christian values in the guise of Canadian or “modern” ideals. No other spirituality, and certainly no Indigenous system of belief, went through a similar process, and therefore cannot be expected to be able to participate in secularism as readily, or at all (Anidjar, 2006). A simple example of how different spiritual practices have more difficulty adjusting to a secular Canadian school system is that Muslims are supposed to pray five times a day, while Christians are supposed to attend church on Sundays. To adhere to their spiritual practices, Muslim students would need to be able to pray at school, while Christian students can attend church on Sunday, a day when there is no school scheduled. Praying at school is not in line with the current understanding of secularism in public schools, and if a student insisted on praying at school it is likely that it would be discouraged and probably relegated out of the public eye. According to Fatah (2012) Park Valley School in Toronto introduced Friday prayers for Muslim students. Up to 30% of the schools population took part in these non-mandatory prayers. An even more significant percentage of students at Park Valley are

Muslim. Despite this, the practice was met with significant backlash from parents and the media. The reasons cited for the backlash ranged from what was essentially Islamophobia to more legitimate concerns over gender equality (Fatah, 2012). The point here is that, for any strident secularist there will always be ways to attack spiritual practices like prayer in school, and the media is often quick to jump on the secular side without truly examining the spiritual practice itself, or the meaning of secularity. One can imagine how people in an area with very few Muslims might react to the introduction of Friday prayers. This kind of public controversy is a strong motivation for principals and school boards to keep prayer out of school.

Asking for an opportunity to pray at school is not evidence that a particular student is somehow more devout or more ritualistic than a given Catholic or Protestant student. It is simply that Islam has different requirements for its followers and some of those requirements make it more difficult to reconcile spending six and a half hours a day without interacting with one's religion in some overt way. The same would apply to an Indigenous person who insisted upon engaging in open interaction with their faith at school. The situation might be handled with more sensitivity, but it is unlikely that open spiritual expression would be encouraged. Some sort of specific plan to accommodate that one student would need to be put in place certainly! But an overall acceptance that religion and spirituality, whether Indigenous or otherwise, have a place in the school life of every student, would not be a consideration.

This lack of openness toward the role that spirituality plays in school poses an obstacle not just to TRC's call to action 48.ii (quoted above), but also to 62. ii. "Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms" (2015a, p. 7). Indigenous perspectives on scientific knowledge differ from secular perspectives. Indigenous forms of scientific knowledge have not experienced the process of secularization that Western sciences have, and are therefore inextricably linked to spirituality. The importance of the Creator in the oral histories of the First Nations people also does not fit with the secularist view of history. Many secularists would see this fact as a disqualifier from inclusion in school, and therefore there would be no reason to fund post-secondary institutions to train educators on how to teach them. One could also argue that students learn Indigenous origin stories in school already and it is accepted. Unfortunately, these stories are studied as the culture of the "other" and not that of the school, and too often they are studied as relics of the past rather than the living, breathing present of all Canadians. To make these spiritual understandings a true part of the Canadian identity would require the shift in focus, and additional funding of post-secondary institutions called for by the TRC.

Assumption 3: Secularism Is Culturally Unbiased

A simple definition of secularism does not involve statements about culture; however, the assumption that secular institutions are culturally neutral, or unbiased, (Brown, 2012) is important to examine when considering how secularism serves Canadian public schools. It is assumed that students and staff do not bring their cultural perspectives to school. This allows them to be free to learn about many cultures, but they are able to do this from a place that has an absence of the biases associated with specific cultural viewpoints. Consequently, the study of cultures in school is almost always limited to a rather superficial examination so as to avoid engaging in any cultural bias. The notion that culture consists of clothing and food, not beliefs and values, is unfortunately prevalent. Once beliefs or worldviews enter into culture, it is seen as the realm of the spiritual, fraught with biases and therefore inappropriate for the public sphere. The assumption of cultural neutrality

functions similarly, and is related to, the assumption that schools work with an absence of religion while the background structure is a Christian one. The cultural scaffolding that supports all education in Canada is a Western one and therefore even when we study cultures, we do it from a Western viewpoint. It is clear even from the language commonly used. We talk about studying “other” cultures, which necessarily implies that a culture exists, from which some cultures are “other”. Defining the exact lines where culture ends and religion starts is extremely difficult, and depends heavily on with whom you are speaking. This is why the idea of cultural neutrality accompanies secularism. It is becoming more and more common in the West to conflate cultural practices and religious practices, and therefore anyone who is a member of a culture that is not the dominant one is required more frequently to leave that culture, and particularly the religious aspects, at home. This results in reaffirming the “hidden” cultural dominance of the West in the guise of an absence of culture.

Undoubtedly, champions of secularism would use the stance that schools are, and should remain, a culturally neutral or unbiased place in opposition to call 62. ii (TRC, 2015, p. 7). They could argue that the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives gives preference to Indigenous culture, beliefs, values, and therefore biases over all others. Since, as already stated, the Canadian education system is rooted in Western perspectives it is clear that this is not the case. Western perspectives and therefore Western biases are given, and always have been given, preference over Indigenous and all other perspectives in Canadian schools.

Why Indigenous Perspectives?

The idea that secularism is a spiritual vacuum where no faiths or cultures can be seen, but all can be believed is a fiction. Secularism is uniquely Western and it works reasonably well for Christianity (Protestantism more specifically) and for non-practicing Westerners. Unfortunately, the reason it works for one spirituality or culture is precisely the reason it does not work well for others. Indigenous cultures and spiritualities did not go through any historical shifts toward secularization, nor did they scaffold Canadian institutions based on their values. Therefore, the Indigenous perspectives are not reflected in our present system, and thus members of those traditions are not experiencing inclusion in that system. If you add to this the fact that, for many Indigenous people, the secular or Western viewpoint represents the viewpoint of their oppressors, it is little wonder that they do not feel welcome in the school system.

An educational traditionalist in Canada will inevitably ask, since Canada is a multicultural nation, why should Indigenous perspectives be included, but not Chinese or Muslim or any number of other perspectives? Let’s put aside the fact that this is not, in and of itself, an argument against including Indigenous perspectives. Let’s also put aside the fact that a school system that could include a multi-perspective approach is a worthy goal. Let’s simply focus on why the Indigenous deserve more attention in Canada. The old perspective that Canada consists of a dichotomy between French and English needs to be discarded. This notion serves to reinforce the cultural biases of the West as outlined above. The real dichotomy in Canadian culture is between Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and in this dichotomy there is a severe power imbalance that needs to be remedied. The present school system does not reflect this dual identity because secularism is a Western ideal. The present attempt at secularism as a form of inclusion in school does not accurately represent Canada as a combination of secular and Indigenous identity. It is important not to think of this dichotomy as

a competition. We reside within the same land. We share many things already; including resources, living space and as I will argue later a certain amount of identity. We just need to share these things more equally and to realize that what is good for one side is good for the other. Increased economic and political self-determination for Indigenous people is good for non-Indigenous people. This is not a case of us and them, but of us and us.

The other main reason that Indigenous perspectives deserve priority over those of other minority groups is a fundamental one that I believe many non-Indigenous people misunderstand. There is a significant difference between a voluntary immigrant population and involuntary, or colonized, peoples. An immigrant, for whatever reason, made a choice to go to a place with a culture that is different from their own, and therefore can be expected to embrace a certain amount of the culture and education that comes with that choice. Indigenous peoples did not get this choice. The Western world forced its views and education and government and way of life on them, sometimes openly and aggressively and sometimes more subtly. This fact is an undeniable argument for giving Indigenous perspectives equal status to that of European perspectives in schools. Indigenous peoples have a right to resurgence in their traditional lands. Anyone who believes otherwise is supporting assimilation as the answer. This thinking hinges on the antiquated and erroneous view that the Western nation state and its accompanying beliefs are the best way for human beings to organize themselves. This stance is not only prejudiced, it has also been shown, through many failed government policies, to not work effectively. Indigenous cultures are, despite great odds, experiencing a comeback in Canada (Saul, 2014). The sooner that we recognize that assimilation is not only wrong, but futile, the sooner we can move forward.

A New Perspective

As already stated, I am not an Indigenous person. My ancestral knowledge is that of the secular West. I am, by no stretch of the imagination, a knowledgeable person when it comes to Indigenous spirituality and perspectives. Even if I was, identifying the many different ways that schools need to change to reflect the Métis nature of this country would far exceed the scope of this paper. I would, however like to take this opportunity to outline some possible ways that the Canadian school system could shift its thinking to allow Indigenous spirituality and perspectives the elevated place they deserve in our schools.

Canada as a Métis Nation

It is important to note that to make schools more reflective of Canada's Indigenous origins does not require a wholesale rejection of all Western secular knowledge. Canada should be understood as a Métis nation. This understanding implies aspects of both cultures and a dialogue between the two.

To begin this dialogue we must teach all of our children, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, about the important role that the Indigenous peoples of this continent play in who we are and the role that they must play in who we will be. John Ralston Saul (2008), in his book *A Fair Country*, speaks of Canada as a Métis Nation: a marriage of European and Indigenous world views. This marriage happened in the first few centuries after sustained contact between Indigenous peoples of Canada and European nations. During this time there were conflicts certainly, but the newcomers to

Canada and the Indigenous populations worked together, helped each other, and learned from each other. There was a healthy partnership that laid the foundations for many things that we view today to be uniquely Canadian. When wave upon wave of Europeans, primarily from the British Isles arrived in Canada and began to settle the west, this partnership was lost. The new Scottish, Irish and English colonizers valued what they considered the security of the nation state. They did not trust the unfamiliar ways of the First Nations in a land that they planned for their families to inhabit for generations. This attitude dominated the Canadian government's view after confederation. With the completion of the railroad, the signing and subsequent failure to fulfill treaty promises, residential schools and the continued toe dragging in court over every aboriginal land claim, the distrust that grew in the 19th century, by the Canadian government of Indigenous people, persists today.

Despite this, the fundamentally Indigenous nature of Canada persists as well. Saul (2008) argues that many of the values and attributes that we are proud of, and view as uniquely Canadian, stem from Indigenous beliefs. Canada made a name for itself in international diplomacy and peace keeping through the employment of consensus building models that owe their foundation to Indigenous circles. Common law partnerships are a valued legal concept in Canada, so much so that Canadians agree to enter into them tacitly after a certain period of time. Saul (2008) posits that this too derives from the inherently Indigenous character of the Canadian nation. We must all see Canada as a Métis Nation, and it is essential that we begin to imagine what the institutions, such as schools, of such a nation need to look like to reflect this dual nature.

Spirituality in a Métis School System

Since, as already argued, Indigenous knowledge did not experience secularization, it is natural that spirituality would have a place in a school system that includes both secular and Indigenous perspectives equally. Vokey (2001) argues that the first step toward incorporating spiritual beliefs in schools is to develop a consensus on a new worldview that reflects and finds agreement between spirituality and Western science. This thinking can be applied to the Indigenous/non-Indigenous divide in Canada. We must work toward a basic worldview that incorporates both Western scientific knowledge and traditional knowledge.

Creating a shared understanding of spiritual development to inform educational initiatives in public schools would also require reaching agreement on a set of elemental moral principles or virtues that all programs would promote. This agreement would establish the basic moral framework within which cultural pluralism could flourish. (Vokey, 2001, p. 13)

One could argue that morals do not belong in schools, but as already discussed, Western values and morals are already in schools. The pretense that schools are morally neutral holds back the pluralism to which Vokey refers. The process of creating a moral framework in which Indigenous spirituality and Western views could exist in harmony would not be an easy one. Also, we cannot think of it as a static goal. It would need to be a never ending dialogue that critically examines both sides, finds common ground, and contrasts differences in ways that are constructive and instructive (Vokey, 2001). Vokey (2001) gives the following example of how a spiritual outlook on academics could help students compare and contrast differing perspectives: “students could be assisted in becoming both willing and able to question the materialistic, deterministic and reductionist world view that is still taken for granted in some science textbooks” (p. 14). Here, Vokey

is talking about spirituality generally, but as previously stated Indigenous perspectives and spirituality are the most culturally, historically and geographically relevant method for promoting this type of questioning in Canadian schools.

Common Ground

Despite my lack of expertise, I would like to use my limited knowledge to suggest a few areas where Indigenous spiritual beliefs have significant overlap with secular disciplines, and some areas where Indigenous perspectives could broaden the scope of Western perspectives to the benefit of all students.

Ecology is an area of overlap between Western and Indigenous perspectives. It is also an area that is sadly neglected in most science curricula today. It is likely that, at the time of contact, First Nations ecological knowledge exceeded that of the Europeans, but of course, it came from a different philosophical understanding. Indigenous knowledge is based on observations and explanations of local phenomena rather than the more global explanations offered through Western science. Additionally, traditional ecology emphasises the importance of human beings as a part of the ecosystem and not separate from it. This is a worldview that is in line with pillars of Western thought such as the work of Charles Darwin, but has been unfortunately neglected in the Western Scientific tradition (Pierotti, 2010).

Once the groundwork was laid through the study of ecology for understanding the world as a web of interconnected systems, it would provide opportunities for what Western academics might call interdisciplinary study. The compartmentalization of areas of research is a Western phenomenon. The idea that sciences like anatomy and ecology are biological sciences, but are frequently studied and understood as wholly separate, is a very limiting understanding of the world and one that would not enter into Indigenous thinking (Pierotti, 2010). In the proposed “hybrid” system, specific knowledge of the functioning of human body systems could be learned from Western science, while the role and place of those systems and indeed of humans themselves within the larger physical and spiritual world could come from traditional Indigenous perspectives. This has positive implications for the study of many other disciplines. For example, Indigenous knowledge does not distinguish between human social systems, and the systems of the natural world, in the same way that Western sociology does. This would open the door for students to gain an increased understanding of social structures and interactions (Pierotti, 2010).

History is another area where Indigenous spiritual perspectives and Western schooling have an opportunity to align for the benefit of all students. The Western view of history is a chronological one. Emphasis is placed on time running along a straight line, and events occurring along that line, one after another. This has led to an understanding of history as a progression toward something and has fed the idea that European civilization is the ultimate goal of all peoples. We hear this in the language used by some to describe other cultures or religions, most commonly these days Islam, as being “stuck in the Dark Ages”, as if they are somehow behind on the line toward the modern, and therefore correct, way of being (Torres, 2010). This type of thinking is not a part of Indigenous knowledge of history. Indigenous history is more temporal rather than chronological. First Nations history is more concerned with the space in which history occurred than it is the timeline of when things happened. History is not a progression toward some ideal of human existence, and therefore the idea that some cultures are behind and others are ahead is not applicable. Reframing cultural history in this way would open the minds of all students to a greater understanding of the world around them. It would teach students that there are countless different ways for people to organize

themselves, practice their spirituality, and meet the general needs required by all societies and that no one way is “correct”. Countering the notion that some ways of life are behind while others are ahead on the line of historical progress and demonstrating that there is no one path toward how humans should live would be a powerful tool against racism and bigotry (Torres, 2010).

I offered here only a few examples of what this harmonized, or Métis, school system could look like and how we could all benefit from this type of unifying framework. I am not in a position to speak further on this topic or to attempt to prescribe any specifics about how this would work. However, I would like you to imagine, if you can, a school system that is backed by agreement on a general moral framework informed by both Indigenous spirituality and Western thought. This school would combine the local insights of Indigenous ecological understandings within the global framework provided by Western science. Students would understand chronology while also appreciating the local, temporal nature of history. Graduates from this system would appreciate the world as a web of interconnected systems, while still having a grasp of the specific functions of the individual components of those systems. All of this could be learned, not from the perspective of an outside observer, but of a participant whose actions and choices are a part of, and have an effect on, everything that surrounds them. Yes, it would take significant institutional change to see this system in existence. However, Vokey (2001) writes that one cause of such change can be “the tension created when the gap between the goals and values professed by an organization and those embodied in its practices exceeds some undeterminable limit” (p. 14). When we look at the educational calls to action made by the TRC (2015a) and the reasons that such a commission was necessary in Canada, I believe we see a school system on the verge of this limit.

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Chapter 2

Re-Conceptualizing Indigenous Student Success in Response to the TRC's Calls to Action

CATHERINE DRAPER

Disclaimer: While it is not my intention to co-opt the struggles of Indigenous peoples, or to imply that my perspective is the right one, it is important that non-Indigenous Canadians, like me, recognize that we have a place as allies. It is our responsibility to support the initiatives of Indigenous people with compassion and an open mind in the spirit of reconciliation.

Black and white statistics provided by standardized success measures create a very bleak picture of Indigenous student achievement in Canada. The 2004 Report from the Office of the Auditor General of Canada reports that “there is a 28 year educational gap between First Nations (on-reserve) and Canadians (para.2),” and that “educational achievement of Aboriginal students (and the gap between their Canadian counterparts) has not changed significantly since the 2000 Report from the same office (para.10)” (as cited in Toulouse, 2006, p. 8). In a more recent, local context, Manitoba Education displays proxy cohort high school graduation rates on their website with line graphs that exhibit the stark contrast between the self-identified Aboriginal students’ June 2014 rate of 54.5% compared to the provincial rate of 87% (Manitoba Education, 2015). Perhaps these statistics are not surprising given the larger scope of tragedies presented as synonymous with Indigenous peoples of Canada in other official reports in areas separate from education; staggering unemployment rates, large numbers of children in care, high rates of alcohol and drug addiction, as well as suicide; the list goes on (Kanu, 2002, p. 103).

While these facts and figures are significant, and have an undeniable role in pinpointing problems that must be urgently addressed, they can be deceptive in their simplicity. Numbers do not provide context; they are not nuanced, or reliable enough for us to accept them without some skepticism (Parriag, Chaulk, Wright & MacDonald, 2010 p. 20). The dominant image presented by these statistics is one of faltering Indigenous peoples in perpetual crisis. As one participant, Rich, in Kanu’s (2002) study explains, “Aboriginal people are seen [in white society] as backward, stupid, and responsible for their own failure. When one individual fails to make it, everyone in the culture is called a failure” (p. 114). This dominant image fosters feelings of helplessness, anger, and apathy among Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike. The problem with this image is that it does not present opportunities for Canadians to see Indigenous people as flourishing, intelligent, creative, tenacious people with agency and capacity.

Too much of the rhetoric around Indigenous issues is laden with the assumption that it is up to non-Indigenous Canadians to create solutions. The history of residential schools has taught us that tragic things happen when non-Indigenous people in positions of authority attempt to solve Indigenous “problems” that they themselves created. With this history in mind, the work of the



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Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) through the *Calls to Action* (TRC, 2015) is crucial because it was created by Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians for all Canadians. The calls made by the Commission demand recognition and immediate response, and position Indigenous peoples in Canada as the primary agents of change to address the legacy of residential schooling.

In the section titled *Education*, the TRC presents seven calls to action, two of which respond to Indigenous student success and achievement:

7. We call upon the federal government to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate *educational and employment gaps* [emphasis added] between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

...

10. We call upon the federal government to draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples. The new legislation would include a commitment to sufficient funding and would incorporate the following principles:

i. Providing sufficient funding to *close identified educational achievement gaps* [emphasis added] within one generation.

ii. Improving education *attainment levels and success rates*. [emphasis added]

(TRC, 2015, pp. 1-2)

Ingrained in TRC calls 7, 10.i., and 10.ii. are assumptions about Indigenous and non-Indigenous students; about the perceived effectiveness of funding as a solution to inequity, and the existing tensions around Canadian attitudes and beliefs towards Indigenous peoples. No less significant are other inherent assumptions about achievement gaps, and how they are conceptualized on a vertical scale from zero to one hundred. The TRC calls insinuate that true educational equity means putting measures in place for Indigenous students to rise to the levels of success experienced by non-Indigenous students; placing these two groups on a value scale and inadvertently suggesting that Indigenous students, and their ways of learning and understanding of success, are lesser than Westernized standards of academic success because they lack the same type of measurable evidence. In essence, by continuing to use Eurocentric or Western success measures, we actively promote the assimilation of Indigenous cultures into the dominant culture.

Canadians may applaud the closing of residential schools and consider it a dark chapter in our collective history that is safely in our past, but in many ways Canadians continue to reinforce the superiority of Western notions of student success that were prevalent in residential schools. We continue to place value in the outcomes of culturally biased standardized testing, we accept an inherently Judeo-Christian based school calendar that values only certain religious holidays regardless of the diverse religious or secular beliefs held by the public, and we accept that the dominant curriculum taught in our public schools is Eurocentric. Marie Battiste (2000) calls this “cognitive imperialism,” or “cultural racism”: “the imposition of one worldview on a people who have an alternate worldview, with the implication that the imposed worldview is superior to the alternative worldview” (pp. 192-193). In this sense, our education system is still working to assimilate Indigenous students.

At the heart of the assumptions around Indigenous and non-Indigenous achievement gaps is a universal application of what student success is; how it is defined, who defines it, and how it is measured. This understanding is important given that the data that drive achievement measures and standards exist to monitor one dominant conception of success despite the fact that such measures are not universally acceptable. Even within Eurocentric and dominant conceptualizations of success there exists some ambiguity. Definitions of student success are very context specific. For example, in

a study, which became the focus of her book *Defining Student Success: The role of school and culture*, Nunn (2014) interviewed and observed students in three high schools in New Jersey that were classified as “Alternative,” “Comprehensive,” and “Elite” (p. 6). Nunn’s findings suggest that “different schools create their own versions of larger cultural ideas, modifying and adapting those that are prevalent in wider society” (p. 3). Although the schools were all located in the same state, their definitions of success were informed by the socioeconomic status of the students and the varied expectations placed upon them.

In order to address the TRC calls effectively it is important that we critically examine the “multiple uses and meanings” of the term “student success” to expose the ambiguities it contains for the purpose of clarification (Burbules & Warnick, 2006, p. 491). Concepts of student success are dictated by culture. Two differing concepts of student success will be examined: one from a dominant Eurocentric perspective, presented in Manitoba and Ontario curriculum documents, *Manitoba K-S4 Education Agenda for Student Success* (Manitoba Education, Training and Youth 2002) and *Growing Success* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010), respectively; and one from a collection of Indigenous perspectives, largely presented in the Canadian Council on Learning document, *Redefining How Success is Measured in First Nations, Inuit and Métis Learning* (2007). These documents were selected based on their relevance to local contexts of Indigenous education, and they are the most current documents pertaining to student success available at the time of this writing. Once both concepts of success have been explored and critiqued, the TRC calls pertaining to academic achievement and student success will be re-examined.

Student Success in Manitoba and Ontario: A Eurocentric Conceptualization

Given the prevalence of the term “student success” in provincial education documents, it would seem imperative that it be defined, yet neither Manitoba nor Ontario documents offer a clear definition. Instead, both documents present subcategories of factors that positively or negatively impact student success, which are outlined in the subsequent paragraphs, and offer suggestions to improve “student learning and performance” (Manitoba Education, Training and Youth, 2002, p. 2; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010).

For ease of analysis, the subcategories presented in the provincial education documents have been cross-referenced and collectively organized using Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecological Systems Theory as a framework. This theory of child development is graphically represented as a series of concentric circles (see Figure 1). Both provincial documents defined the influences of student success by factors in the individual students’ Microsystem (e.g., parents, peers, teachers), Mesosystem (e.g., classroom environment), and Exosystem (e.g., community, school board).

In both documents very little emphasis is placed on the individual student when it comes to factors influencing their success, which seems like a great oversight. From the perspective of both provincial documents, the individual student is presented as both the passive center around which outlying factors revolve, while simultaneously devoid of any personal accountability for his or her own success.

In terms of the Microsystem, there is a consensus in the documents that parental involvement is one of the keys to student success; “Students succeed when educators and parents build stronger relationships with one another creating more opportunities for students to develop competence and more settings in which learners flourish” (Manitoba Education, Training and Youth, 2002, p. 5). Teachers are also present in the Microsystem as stakeholders in student success, and recommendations suggest that school divisions should be “improving learning opportunities for

educators” in order to “contribute to improved student learning and performance” (Manitoba Education, Training and Youth, 2002, p. 6). Once again, agency appears to be placed in the hands of the adults who influence the individual student. In this Eurocentric model, one common assumption is that teachers are the keepers of knowledge, thus the emphasis on their need for additional training related to curriculum.

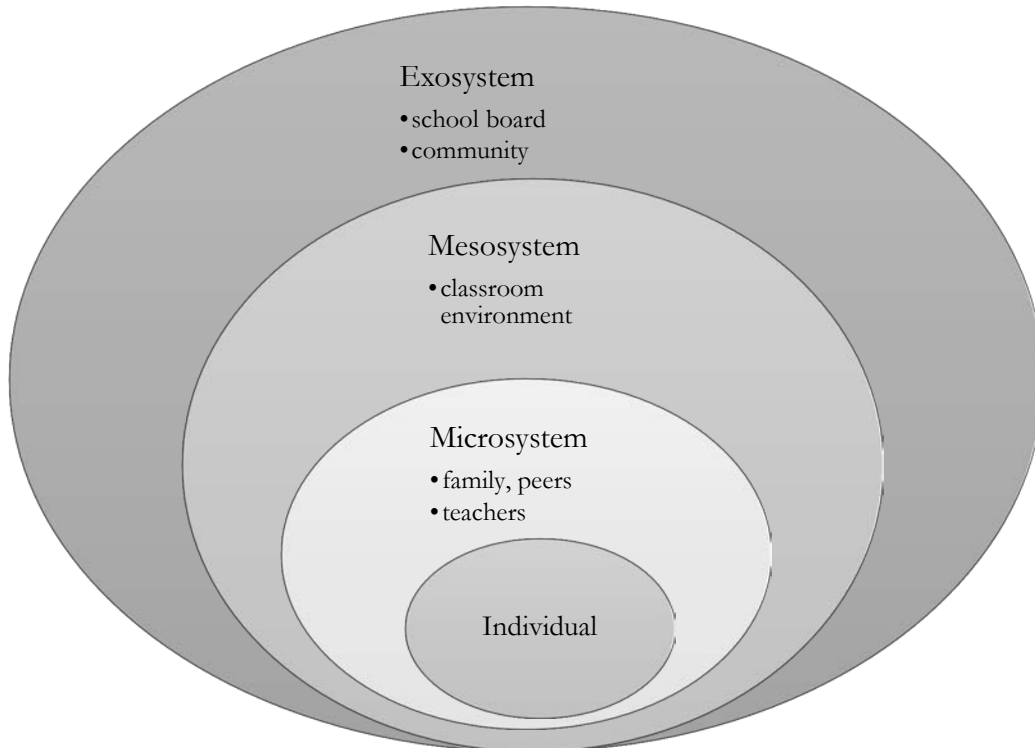


Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Development. Based on *Ecology of human development* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

In the Mesosystem, the provincial education documents underscore the importance of an appropriate classroom and school environment. “Teachers create environments in which all students feel valued and confident and have the courage to take risks and make mistakes” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 8). Inherent in this language is the assumption that it is the teacher who creates learning environments, suggesting less room for a learning environment that is co-constructed with students. School culture was also identified as a contributing factor to student success. Learner outcomes improve through the training and talent of teachers, what goes on in the classrooms and the overall culture and atmosphere of schools (Manitoba Education, Training and Youth, 2002, p. 2). In this sense student learning is somewhat restricted by the culture of the school which seems to be largely determined by the professionals who work there.

Lastly, the factors contributing to student success in the Exosystem include the larger school community and school board or division. Manitoba Education, Training and Youth (2002) details

the necessity of strengthening community links in order to “provide opportunities for students to develop competence” (p. 5). It is unclear in what context students are encouraged to develop competence. The Manitoba provincial document is non-specific when it comes to the term “student success”. It would appear that individual schools and divisions are left to create their own definition.

What is clear from the two provincial documents is the importance of healthy and respectful relationships between all the stakeholders of individual student success. The documents present the ideal circumstances for all students: a loving and supportive home and school environment, caring parents and teachers, and “collaborative student-teacher relationships” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 32). However, this idealized conceptualization neglects to discuss the inequitable or problematic relationships that Indigenous students and their families may experience in public school systems. While it may appear that success is equally attainable for all students, the reality is that access to education may not be equitable (Nunn, 2014).

Measuring Success

Another separate concept tied to student success that is prevalent in both the Ontario and Manitoba education documents, but does not fit within the Bronfenbrenner framework, is that of “outcomes.” The language used indicates that student success is many things, but above all it produces “learner outcomes” or “measurable results” that are determined by “standards” and can be summarized in “reports” (Manitoba Education, Training and Youth, 2002, pp. 2, 8; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, pp. 1, 2). All manner of measures are used to determine if students are successful including, but not limited to: graduation rates, attendance records, credit accumulation, standardized test results, drop-out/retention rates and report cards. Rather than apply measures to evaluate the effect of outside factors that contribute to student success, the individual students are the sole focus of evaluations; but, for their success, only factors outside of students’ individual control are considered. Within this model of education and influence, students are unable to determine what success means to them, and how they measure that success on their own terms.

Of all the reports that measure the outcome of student success, one that is most familiar and valued is the standardized report card; more specifically, the report card reveals the outcome of assessments and evaluation policies. By both Manitoba and Ontario standards, a student is successful if he or she has received credit in their courses with a final grade possibly barely above 50%. However, should a passing grade be equated with success? The benchmark of a 50% grade is entirely arbitrary and context specific as it represents varying levels of achievement across subjects, grades, schools, and divisions. In senior grades in Manitoba the final decision on whether a student is granted a credit “rests with the principal, who consults with teachers, parents, and other specialists as appropriate” (Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, 2015, p.10). In the K-12 system in Ontario, teachers determine the final grades on report cards and can recommend students for “credit recovery” courses in cases where students earn a failing grade based on incomplete work (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 84). Credit recovery teachers will then work with students for a short period of time to complete enough missing work to warrant a revised passing grade. Credit recovery courses are considered “essential options for students who fail one or more credits” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 89). In an Ontario context academic success is equated with quantity of work completed rather than authentic student understanding.

A Critique of Eurocentric Conceptualization of Student Success

It is clear from the above attempt to define student success from the provincial education documents that the term is rather ambiguous. In Manitoba, student success refers to the outcome of positive interventions and influences at the micro and macro level. In Ontario, the emphasis on the different levels of influence is present, but the focus on measurable outcomes is even more widespread. Ontario uses the term “student success” in a myriad of ways. There are “Student Success Teams” and “Student Success Teachers” (Does this title not apply to all teachers?), and a “Student Success Strategy” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, pp. 154-155). There is even a “Student Success Commission” (Student Success Commission, 2006). All of these titles, and their accompanying policies and commissions are dedicated to increasing the number of students who graduate. The documents express concern for the well-being and academic success of students, but what considerations have we made for the success of students beyond high school?

Success is always conceptualized as the opposite of failure in a rigid dichotomy; success is good and failure is bad. By conceptualizing success/failure as a binary there is no space for the existence of varying degrees of success, only absolutes. Furthermore, the emphasis on benchmarks of success create a culture of fixated focus on students at the threshold (or students on the verge of passing with a minimum of 50%). This can have a negative impact on students who fall on opposite ends of the pass/fail spectrum because “educators focus their efforts on students whom they can reasonably expect to move over the threshold for proficiency, particularly when outcomes are tied to funding” (Friesen & Krauth, 2012, p. 13). In doing so, “they reduce the attention paid to students who are very weak or very strong” (Friesen & Krauth, 2012, p. 14).

The effects of our outcome based and value-infused focus on student success are threefold. They are potentially harmful to students because equating student success with academic achievement in school limits their perception of success, and increases anxiety around failure. We do not want students to fail, yet students are often threatened with failure. For Indigenous students who may experience failure after failure within our current school system, the effect of this is an increased apathy toward academic pursuits and negative self-concept. A qualitative study by Whitley (2014) reveals that Indigenous students “might not participate in school because of their self-perception as academically unsuccessful. One teacher described students as choosing not to attend events and classes so that ‘they don’t have to fail a lot of the things’” (p. 169).

A second effect of the value messages associated with student success is that schools may be inadvertently perpetuating social class inequities, expecting modified versions of student success depending on the socioeconomic makeup of the school (Anyon, 1980). For example, students in schools of lower social class are taught that success is the result of consistent effort and job-ready skills like punctuality, while students in elite schools are taught that hard work without inherent intelligence is not a guarantee of success (Nunn, 2014).

A third, and highly problematic, effect of our current understanding of student success is that it does not allow students to determine what success means to them, beyond academic achievement. Instead, “they draw heavily on their own school’s definition of success” as it has been outlined in policies and reinforced through school culture (Nunn, 2014, p. 3). The education system determines what student success means, and indoctrinates students to accept and internalize the value messages associated with passing or failing. This narrow, Eurocentric conceptualization of student success valuing academic achievement to the exclusion of other aspects of success has inadvertently encouraged students to sacrifice their mental health, physical health, and well-being to pursue success outcomes that will never be considered enough (Bradley & Greene, 2013; Symons, Cinelli, James & Groff, 1997).

A common assumption within the provincial documents previously examined is that the factors that support student success are equally accessible to all Canadians. Every student can be successful in our school systems. Critics of the TRC calls addressing achievement gaps may suggest that if students of other minoritized or racialized groups can succeed in our current system, with our dominant Eurocentric view of success, that the system should work for Indigenous students as well. However, the educational opportunities available to Indigenous Canadians are not the same as those available to non-Indigenous Canadians; and the assimilationist nature of our current system is also problematic for other vulnerable populations (Tatar & Horenczyk, 2003; Wang, 2013). Even though many school divisions across Canada are working diligently to provide equal opportunities, and differentiate instruction and curriculum to address the needs of diverse groups, inequities still exist. Cognitive dissonance occurs between policy and reality when school systems struggle to redefine the status quo. “Despite racially and culturally diverse school demographics, many public schools in Canada still welcome multiculturalism only to the extent that it fits into, rather than challenges or disrupts, Eurocentric epistemologies and pedagogies” (Kanu, 2014, p. 130).

Many facets of our current education system are not fully utilized or available to students due to inequitable funding models, resource allocation, and barriers to access such as the remote locations of reservation communities. All of these factors have a direct impact on a student’s ability to succeed according to the norms of Eurocentric student achievement. For example, a study by Saunders and Hill (2007) discusses “insufficient school resources,” such as textbooks and computers, the lack of certified and adequately trained teachers, and the physically unsafe environments in remote reservation schools in British Columbia (p. 1035).

Achievement gaps, conceptualized through a Western lens, are often perceived on a vertical scale where optimal achievement (100%) is at the top, and failure is at the bottom. With this conception, the gap can only be closed in one direction, from the bottom up. Otherwise, the insinuation is that high standards must be lowered in order for all students to meet with success, and no one wants to lower standards. If we continue to maintain high expectations as determined by existing Eurocentric success measures that are biased towards a particular notion of what constitutes successful achievement, then some Indigenous students are set up for failure. This is not because they are unable to achieve high expectations, but because they are being asked to live up to the wrong high expectations. Furthermore, the vertical conceptualization of success carries with it the assumption that the students who are not achieving optimal success are responsible for improvement. They must try harder and learn to adapt to standardized and dominant success measures in order to be conventionally successful. Through this vertical conception of achievement gaps, Indigenous students have already demonstrated a history of “failure,” and in some cases have been blamed for their failure as a result of racist stereotypes about inherent intellectual ability (Henry & Tator, 2006). This is unlikely to change without a monumental shift in our perceptions of success.

Student Success as Conceptualized by Indigenous Peoples

Similar to the provincial documents, the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL, 2007) report, *Redefining How Student Success is Measured in First Nations, Inuit and Métis Learning*, does not provide a clear definition of student success. However, the conceptualization of student success and the factors that affect it are quite different from the Ontario and Manitoba documents (see Figure 2) ¹.

¹ It is important to note that the Holistic Lifelong Learning Model presented in Figure 2 is one of three in the document, whereby the other two represent corresponding Inuit and Métis models.

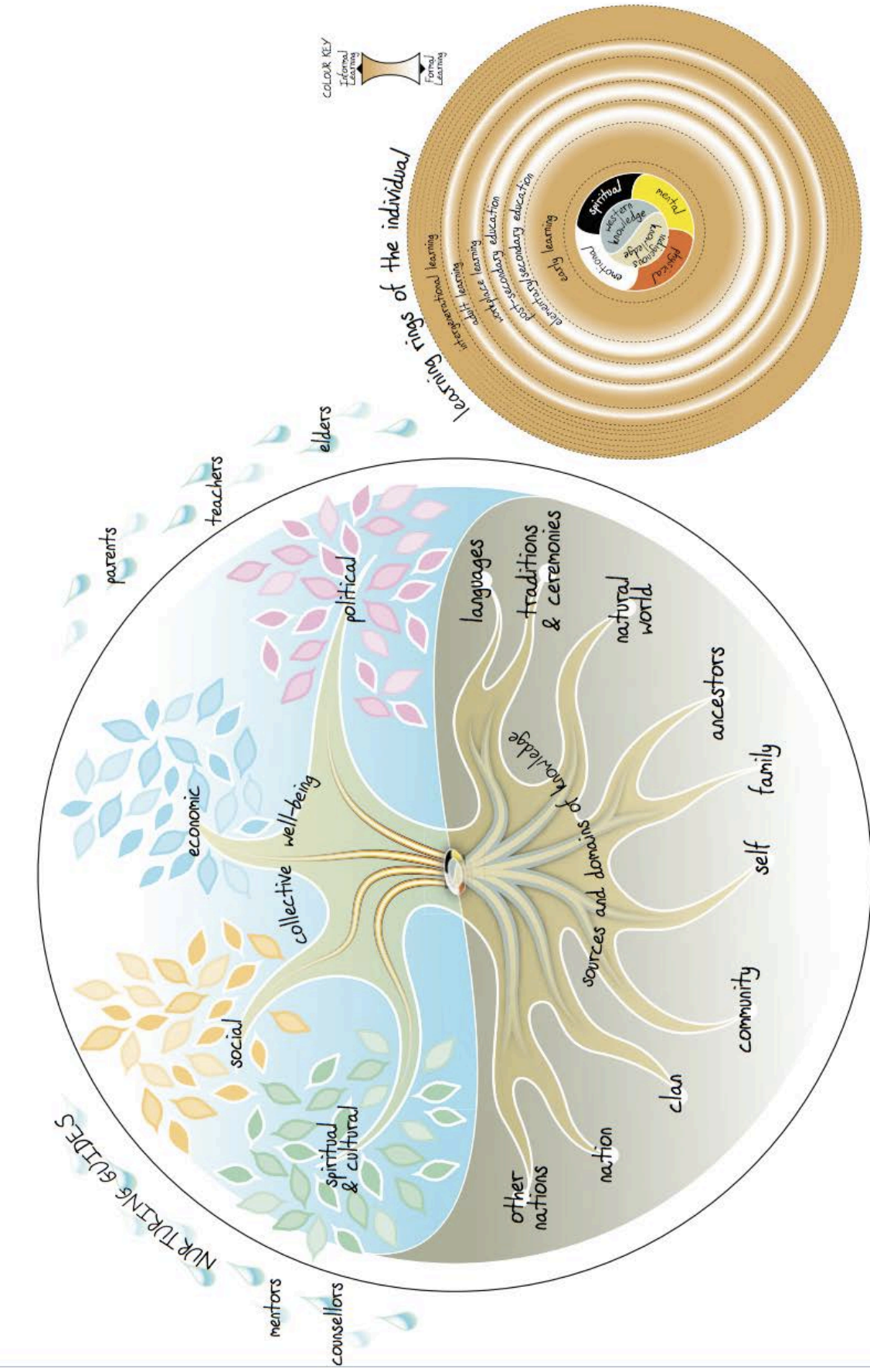


Figure 2. First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model (CCL, 2007, p. 19).

There is no definitive or common view of student success for all Indigenous groups in Canada. To imply that all Indigenous cultures envision education the same way, or that Indigenous students as a whole learn the same way would be reductionist and disrespectful of the distinct cultures of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. Indigenous culture is “not a unified whole, and although there may be distinctive learning patterns among cultures, great variations exist among individuals within groups” (Kanu, 2002, p. 110).

Some of the factors that influence student success described in CCL (2007) overlap with the factors identified in the provincial documents. For instance, the importance of strong relationships between parents and teachers is emphasized, with a particular focus on maintaining “a fully actualized linguistic and cultural identity [...] from within their own Aboriginal context” (Battiste, 2000, p. 192). Considering the negative associations residential school survivors and intergenerational survivors may have with their own school experiences, it is vital that school divisions work diligently to address the varying degrees of mistrust survivors may have of school systems: “Engaging [Indigenous] parents/guardians will require patience, time, consistency and understanding” (Toulouse, 2013, p. 12). One way to address this mistrust, and another factor influencing student success, are the presence of “caring teachers who are knowledgeable about Aboriginal issues and topics and pedagogical strategies (or are willing to acquire such knowledge) and value them sufficiently to integrate them into their curricula on a consistent basis” (Kanu, 2007, p. 37).

One important difference between Eurocentric and Indigenous concepts of success is the idea that classroom teachers are only one of many “nurturing guides,” who have no more or less influence than other stakeholders like elders, mentors and counsellors (CCL, 2007, p. 19). There is no hierarchy of knowledge. Knowledge is shared, therefore, everyone in the school community is simultaneously occupying the role of teacher and student. The use of a tree to symbolize the Lifelong Learning Model serves as an analogy to the ideal cycle of learning between individuals and communities. “The leaves fall and provide nourishment to the roots to support the tree’s foundation. Similarly, the community’s collective well-being rejuvenates the individual’s learning cycle” (CCL, 2007, p. 19). Learners and the communities they belong to are in a constant state of rejuvenation and rebirth.

A second key difference between the Eurocentric provincial framework of success and Indigenous perspectives is the emphasis on the importance of student self-concept; within this model, students have agency and control over their learning. More importantly, they are given the autonomy to create their own definitions of success, and experience success in domains beyond traditional academics, including areas like the “natural world” and “family” (CCL, 2007, p. 19). In fact, self-knowledge is equally valued in conjunction with all of the other domains. This notion, if adopted by the dominant education system could have a very positive effect on academic student success.

Given findings reported in the small body of extant literature, it is evident that individual student variables such as self-concept, motivation and academic aspirations are likely as influential on academic success for Aboriginal students as they are for non-Aboriginal students. (Whitley, 2014, p. 159)

With this in mind, it stands to reason that assessment and evaluation practices should reflect the efforts of students in ways that deviate from standardized measures. “Student grades and their perceptions of [them] are important to consider” as they reinforce “messages of success” and influence “self-concept and later success” (Whitley, 2014, p. 165).

A third component of Indigenous frameworks of student success that differs slightly from provincial models is the interconnectedness of individual and community. Within Indigenous cultures, learning is a communal activity where members share the responsibility of problem solving. As one student, in Kanu (2002) put it:

In the [Aboriginal] community, if you don't have the right answer you are not criticized directly... you ask for help because you know the people that are around you, so you feel secure... you are doing it for the community so everyone pitches in. (p. 109)

This is quite different from “mainstream educational practices within public schools” that “commonly promote learning through a focus on...competitiveness, individuality, status projection, and outside judgment” (Preston & Claypool, 2013, p. 273). From an Indigenous perspective, success is collectively shared rather than held by individuals; collective success *supports* individual success. With this in mind, a shift from focusing on collecting data on individual success measures, as observed in the Eurocentric conceptualization of success, to considering measures of holistic success makes sense and could go a long way towards addressing achievement gaps.

A fourth and essential aspect of Indigenous frameworks of student success is the emphasis on holistic education. Through this lens, collective and individual well-being is the key to success. Traditional Eurocentric education models are not typically concerned with the success of students beyond high school. “Relatively few measures are reported that can satisfy the wishes of Aboriginal parents and communities to monitor the social, physical, and spiritual well-being of individuals and communities throughout the life cycle” (Friesen & Krauth, 2012, p. 1). However, embedded throughout the Canadian Council on Learning document are references to “lifelong learning,” “collective well-being,” and “harmony” (CCL, 2007, p. 19). In comparison, the Eurocentric conceptualization of success seems limited. In light of this difference, it seems imperative to consider that our dominant view of success should expand or shift to encompass factors beyond academic achievement. “We must explore the relationships between micro and macrolevel [*sic*] variables affecting schooling,” to realize that “meaningful and lasting intervention requires a systemic, holistic, and comprehensive approach” (Kanu, 2007, p. 38).

Conclusion

The TRC's concepts of student success and achievement gaps need to be carefully considered, otherwise there is a real danger that the very structures and belief systems that the TRC purports to be challenging could be inadvertently reinforced (Snyder, 2010). We must change our understanding and definition of student success at it relates to academic achievement, or Indigenous students will continue to be educated within a system that presents the guise of change and empowerment, but will practice the same oppressions as its predecessors. Current education practices and public schooling systems in Canada do not function in the same ways as residential schools once did, one would hope, but in many ways we continue to indoctrinate Indigenous students by forcing them to adopt the dominant discourse in education of Eurocentric epistemologies and pedagogies including assessment and evaluation measures. We continue to place Indigenous students in care, far from their immediate families, in order for them to pursue education beyond the levels currently available within reservation schools.

The solution to the problem of educational success that the TRC presents is not necessarily additional funding. Educational assimilation and financial equality do not create true equity. It is inexcusable that Indigenous students receive less funding than their non-Indigenous peers; there is no doubt that this must be remedied immediately. However, even if every Indigenous student in Canada had access to unlimited financial resources, it would not guarantee that they would be treated equitably. The real solution is a revolutionary shift in the collective Canadian conscience to recognize that Western/Eurocentric school systems do not work for everyone; not for many Indigenous students, not for other minoritized groups, and not necessarily for people of European descent either. The solution is acknowledging and accepting that Indigenous ways of knowing and holistic education, that honouring the importance of an individual as they connect to the larger community, and that considering spiritual and physical well-being and self-concept are not only valid, but crucial to the success of all students, and critical to the future success and reconciliation of our diverse nation.

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Chapter 3

Inclusion of Indigenous Perspectives in Schools

EMILY PAGTAKHAN

Schools are reflections of society. Burbules (2004) uses the term “sociocultural reproduction” to describe how “norms or standards, however worthwhile they might appear, always express the values and assumptions of a particular group, place, and time” (p. 4). In 2005, Bill 13 – The Public Schools Amendment Act (Appropriate Educational Programming) was passed by the Manitoba legislature. The Manitoba government adopted and continues to support a philosophy of inclusion, which is defined as:

a way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued and safe. An inclusive community consciously evolves to meet the changing needs of its members. Through recognition and support, an inclusive community provides meaningful involvement and equal access to the benefits of citizenship. (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006b, p. 1)

Bill 13 reflects a change in values within society and with its adoption, many school divisions and schools now have written priorities pertaining to inclusion.

Brighouse (2006) states, “the central purpose of education is to promote human flourishing” (p. 42). The definition of flourishing, for the purpose of this paper, refers to developing human capacities, capabilities, and potentials (Cherkowski & Walker, 2013). Personally, I agree with Brighouse’s statement and feel that schools must provide students with learning experiences that promote the discovery and development of their capacities, capabilities, and potentials. It is my opinion that a philosophy of inclusion supports the idea that the purpose of education is to, indeed, promote human flourishing.

In a resource document, titled *Appropriate education programming in Manitoba: Extending genuine learning and social experiences for all school communities*, it states, “A significant amount of students, particularly students with disabilities, have not had equal access to educational opportunities and encounter many barriers to learning and social interactions with friends and peers” (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006a, p. 1) A philosophy of inclusion prompts schools to make investments in the form of school personnel, professional development, and specialized resources to support these students. Inclusion ensures that students, who may otherwise be excluded due to learning or social barriers, are supported in an environment, alongside their peers. By including students, who may have been excluded in the past, in learning and social experiences, and providing opportunities to discover and develop their potentials, human flourishing is promoted through inclusion.



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In 2015, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) released its *Calls to Action* (TRC, 2015a), in which the Commission published ninety-four calls to action “to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation” (p. 1). This document is an important one, as it outlines how all Canadians can move toward reconciliation, particularly the ways in which non-Indigenous Canadians play an important part in this necessary process. Reports pertaining to the TRC and Indian Residential Schools (IRS) are frequently in the media. In addition, it appears that more is being done to facilitate a dialogue that supports reconciliation in Canada. Through events such as university symposia, or museum exhibits that highlight Indigenous issues, as well as television shows and documentaries seeking to educate Canadians about topics facing Indigenous citizens, more opportunities for dialogue and learning are happening. Most recently, the Supreme Court of Canada “ruled that tens of thousands of Métis and non-status Indians are now under the jurisdiction of the federal government” (Fontaine, 2016), a move which will positively influence the relationship between Metis and other First Nations and the Canadian government. Reconciliation is being recognized as an important step needing to occur to improve relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians.

Societal values related to reconciliation and Indigenous cultural inclusion are shifting and schools need to reflect this shift. Sociocultural reproduction needs to occur in this area. If a dialogue of reconciliation is happening in society, one should also be happening in schools. As per Manitoba Education’s definition of inclusion, as inclusive communities, schools need to evolve with the changing needs of its members (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006b). With this in mind, one way that schools can evolve is by looking at inclusion through a different lens, one that embeds Indigenous education into the life of the school in order to facilitate reconciliation.

The TRC makes several calls to action under various domains, including education. This facilitates opportunities for a dialogue of reconciliation to occur in schools, at all grade levels. Specifically, Number 63.iii states, “We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including: ... (iii) Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect” (TRC, 2015a, p. 7). Looking at the definition of inclusion through a lens that promotes Indigenous perspectives may be the place to start, as the responses to this call will allow Indigenous students to indeed feel accepted, valued, and safe. The responses will also promote equal access and meaningful involvement among Indigenous students. This paper discusses ways in which inclusion, as it pertains to Indigenous perspectives in education, is beneficial to all students; the impact that exposure to Indigenous perspectives and reconciliation has on the greater society; and the ways in which inclusion addresses the call “for building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect” (TRC, 2015a, p. 7). Ultimately, this form of inclusion promotes human flourishing among all students.

Inclusion: A Benefit to All

Indian residential schools (IRS) were part of Canada’s educational system for over a century, the last one closing in the late 1990s (TRC, 2015b, p. 6). “Canada separated children from their parents, sending them to residential schools. This was done not to educate them, but primarily to break their link to their culture and identity” (TRC, 2015b, pp. 5-6). In describing his father’s experience at St. Mary’s Indian Residential School near Kenora, Ontario, Kinew (2015) writes:

As soon as he arrived, Tobasonakwut's hair was cut short and he was stripped of the name given to him by his father. The priests and nuns replaced it with a number – 54 – and an Irish name: Peter Kelly. He was even stripped of the language he had spoken all his life, a language passed down through untold generations of ancestors. Speaking Anishinaabemowin within earshot of his new custodians earned him a beating with a ruler or a belt. In the classroom, he was expected to speak English, but outside that room his keepers spoke French to their charges. (p. 15)

This school system caused an enormous amount of pain for many individuals and families. The IRS system promoted segregation and the sociocultural reproduction happening in schools at this time reflected a clear attempt to eradicate Indigenous culture, committing cultural genocide. IRS took away important opportunities needed to build stable futures and flourishing lives. Describing his father's testimony to the TRC, Kinew (2015) writes, "Instead of only focusing on the abuse and mistreatment he suffered, . . . he also pointed out that he had been robbed of educational opportunities that he had the intellectual capacity for, as evidenced by his diploma and degree" (p. 94). Instead of promoting human flourishing, the IRS system did the exact opposite. It prevented Indigenous people from building cultural identity, from getting a meaningful education, and from learning necessary skills to be able to maintain relationships. It prevented Indigenous people from leading flourishing lives and did not allow them to fully develop their human capacities, capabilities, and potentials. The IRS system stunted the cultural, educational, and social development of several generations of Indigenous people.

Today, the educational system is vastly different in that schools now strive to identify, honour, and celebrate diversity in all forms – from cultural diversity to neurodiversity. Schools work to create safe places where students are accepted and valued; where they can learn and grow, both socially and academically. Inclusive schools hold several core values including:

- All students can learn, in different ways and at different rates.
- All students have individual abilities and needs.
- All students want to feel they belong and are valued.
- All students have the right to benefit from their education.
- All students come from diverse backgrounds and want their differences to be respected.

(Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006b, pp. 4-5)

A philosophy of inclusion provides opportunities for students who may otherwise be excluded due to social or learning barriers, to be supported in an environment that promotes human flourishing – developing capacities, capabilities, and potentials. Education in Canada has made great strides in terms of inclusion, but more needs to be done.

With this said, we need to acknowledge that students who may be excluded due to social or learning barriers are not only students with exceptionalities. We need to acknowledge that students with Indigenous roots whose families continue to deal with the effects of IRS also experience social or learning barriers. Indigenous people are also identified as being at risk for exclusion (CMEC with CCUNESCO 2008, as cited in Katz, 2012). Bombay, Matheson, and Ainsman (2014), in their research of IRS and historical trauma, state that "studies have also suggested that having a familial history of IRS attendance interacts with current stressors to influence well-being, and that the risk associated with IRS trauma may accumulate across generations" (p. 323). They report that higher

rates of suicidal thoughts or attempts, depression, and learning difficulties impacting educational success were found to occur in youth who had one parent attend IRS versus youth who had no parents attend IRS (Bombay, Matheson, & Ainsman, 2014). Graduation rates of Indigenous students are also far lower as compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts (Katz, 2012). “The lack of true education and the abuse that the schools represent in the minds and hearts of Aboriginal peoples today have left a lasting distrust of school and education systems” (Katz, 2012, p. 185). Extra supports and resources, culturally responsive teaching and inclusion, and the opportunity to experience schooling in an environment that celebrates diversity and respects each student’s individuality need to be extended to the Indigenous student population. Schools need to evolve to meet the needs of its Indigenous members. The damage from IRS needs to be undone, as the risk is too great to do otherwise.

If the goal of education is for our students to leave the school system equipped to lead flourishing lives, having been provided the tools necessary to develop their full individual potentials, educators must ensure that Indigenous students, in particular, feel accepted and valued. Oskineegish (2014) explores the need for culturally responsive teaching practices and cultural inclusion, “the inclusion of Anishnaabe languages, local knowledge and history, and land-based skills and practices,” as a way to meet the needs of Indigenous students (p. 513). Through interviews with non-Indigenous teachers working in Indigenous communities, she finds that this cultural inclusion has a positive impact on students’ self-esteem, on their willingness to engage in academic tasks, as well as on individual relationships with students and the larger community (Oskineegish, 2014). Currently, teachers have a great opportunity to positively impact the Indigenous student population who were mistreated for so long. By becoming culturally responsive to the needs of Indigenous students, it will show students that Indigenous perspectives are indeed valued.

Not only will cultural inclusion of Indigenous perspectives benefit Indigenous students, it will also benefit our non-Indigenous students. Katz (2012) discusses how Indigenous perspectives such as sustainability, building community, and the role of Elders within the community can have a positive impact on all students. “These perspectives can enrich the curricula for all our learners, not just those of Aboriginal descent, and in so doing, will make our schools feel more inclusive and recognizable to Aboriginal peoples” (Katz, 2012, p. 188). While such perspectives may not be part of all students’ cultural backgrounds, incorporating these teachings into classrooms and schools creates opportunities for non-Indigenous students to become more aware and more understanding of their Indigenous peers. Cultural inclusion of Indigenous perspectives promotes understanding and respect among all students. Schools that evolve to support students in a culturally inclusive environment create opportunities to build allies. Specifically, allies are built among our non-Indigenous students to support their Indigenous peers, which facilitates a dialogue of reconciliation in schools.

Inclusion: The Impact on Society

As previously discussed, the IRS system had very detrimental effects on several generations of families. As a result of segregation, of children being taken away from their homes to be put in un-nurturing environments, of being stripped of their language and culture, thousands of Indigenous people were prevented from adequately developing cultural knowledge, as well as important educational and social skills. Kinew (2015) gives this account:

Generations were raised by strangers, and in some cases abusers. When those generations came home and started families, they treated us, their children, as they had been treated in those institutions. . . . My father was raised by people who didn't love him, and he was punished when he showed any vulnerability. And so the pathology is transmitted to a new generation. That void, that hole in our spirits that should be filled by love, is instead filled for too many young people by partying, violence, and other forms of destructive self-medication. (p. 184)

Kinew's experience is shared by many families whose members attended IRS. The many decades that these schools were in operation prevented Indigenous people from being able to lead flourishing lives. As a result, the ability for Indigenous nations to grow and thrive was stunted.

Canada's ability to grow and thrive as a unified nation was also stunted as a result of IRS. A deep wedge divided Indigenous and non-Indigenous people for many years, and continues to linger in today's society. Although a dialogue of reconciliation is currently happening in many societal circles, many citizens continue to hold negative views of Indigenous people. A 2015 *Maclean's* magazine article sheds light on this issue and examines racist attitudes toward Indigenous people specifically in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Macdonald (2015) states, "Winnipeg is arguably becoming Canada's most racist city," as she discusses issues concerning missing and murdered Indigenous women, poor housing, and educational disparities among Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Canada's current relationship with Indigenous people needs to be addressed if we are to be a fully reconciled and unified nation.

For this very reason, schools must become an area where a dialogue of reconciliation occurs, as well as a place where Indigenous perspectives are taught. "The inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives into curricula will benefit not only Aboriginal people, but non-Aboriginal peoples as well. All students are denied a quality education if they are not exposed to the contributions made by all people in the development of the county in which they live" (Manitoba Education and Youth, 2003, p. 1). Although the ability for Indigenous nations to grow and thrive was stunted, it has not been stopped. There exists a great opportunity for Indigenous nations to flourish, and tremendous potential for Canada to become a unified nation. As schools become more culturally inclusive of Indigenous perspectives, Hongyan (2012) believes "This different approach to learning could enhance the sense of connection and purpose among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth, motivating them to understand each other better and further their studies" (p. 56). This mutual understanding, borne out of cultural inclusion, facilitates a dialogue of reconciliation in classrooms, and conveys the message that all students are accepted.

Inclusive schools that incorporate Indigenous perspectives into academic and social areas of school-life allow Indigenous students to feel valued. In addition, they create communities that are more understanding and respectful of each other. Hongyan (2012) further explains that "a more understanding and generous society could be created with collective efforts made by student, teaching, and administrative bodies" (p. 56). While the history of cultural segregation and devaluing of Indigenous culture has had harmful effects on Indigenous students and damaging effects on Canadian society as a whole, the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives into school-life could have a lasting positive impact on Indigenous students, their relationships with non-Indigenous peers, and the greater society moving forward.

Inclusion: A Response to the TRC

One of the calls to action pertaining to education is 63.iii: “We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including: ... (iii) Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect” (TRC, 2015a, p. 7). A philosophy of inclusion aligns with this call, as inclusion allows students to feel accepted and valued which then promotes understanding, empathy, and respect. Through cultural inclusion, the three traits listed in this call can be nurtured, positively impacting students for many years to come.

Over the last several years, Manitoba Education has released several documents which support the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives including, *Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives into Curricula: A Resource for Curriculum Developers, Teachers, and Administrators* (Manitoba Education and Youth, 2003). The primary purpose of this document “is to enable teachers to facilitate students’ understanding of the Aboriginal perspectives in Manitoba” (p. 1). The document also lists goals for integrating Aboriginal perspectives for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students:

For Aboriginal students:

- To develop a positive self-identity through learning their own histories, cultures, traditional values, contemporary lifestyles, and traditional knowledge
- To participate in a learning environment that will equip them with the knowledge and skills needed to participate more fully in the unique civic and cultural realities of their communities

For non-Aboriginal students:

- To develop an understanding and respect for the histories, cultures, traditional values, contemporary lifestyles, and traditional knowledge of Aboriginal peoples
 - To develop informed opinions on matters relating to Aboriginal peoples
- (Manitoba Education and Youth, 2003, p. 1)

The goals set out by the province related to inclusive Indigenous education support call 63.iii. Through cultural inclusion, there is greater chance for understanding, empathy, and respect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to occur.

Cultural inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in schools facilitates a dialogue of reconciliation. Kinew (2015) describes reconciliation as occurring on a more intimate level when he describes the relationship and path to reconciliation between his father and an archbishop, whom his father welcomes as a brother through an adoption ceremony, stating, “Reconciliation is realized when two people come together and understand that what they share unites them and that what is different about them needs to be respected” (p. 211). This sentiment can also be applied to the classroom and how the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives can create paths to reconciliation for our students. Cultural inclusion fosters an understanding amongst staff and students that what they share unites them and that their differences also need to be respected.

At this point, however, it is necessary to acknowledge the work that has already been done in the area of Indigenous education. Provincial documents, a provincial Aboriginal Education Directorate, school division consultants and support teachers, as well as numerous curricular resources have been created to support the inclusion of Indigenous education in schools. While the

official *Calls to Action* was published in 2015, the need had already been acknowledged and steps were, and continue to be, taken.

It is also important to acknowledge the work that still needs to be done in this area. In a study of two grade 9 Social Studies teachers, Kanu (2007) writes of the impact two distinctly different approaches to Indigenous education has on Indigenous student achievement. One teacher “placed such integration [of Indigenous perspectives] at the center of his classroom teaching, believing it to be a philosophical underpinning of the curriculum” (p. 27), while the other did not go any further than teaching what was in the text book (Kanu, 2007). Kanu found that:

the integration of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and perspectives in student learning outcomes, instructional methods and resources, assessment, and as part of the philosophical underpinning of the curriculum, results in positive outcomes. These positive outcomes included higher test scores, better conceptual understanding, higher level thinking, and improved self-confidence. (p. 38)

While much research exists supporting the need for the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in schools, there remain many teachers like the second teacher in Kanu’s (2007) study. Although we have taken many steps forward in regards to Indigenous education, many improvements still need to be made, including supporting teachers who may need extra resources and training to build their own intercultural understanding. “When the integration of Aboriginal perspectives is believed to be a philosophical underpinning of the curriculum, it ceases to be an occasional add-on activity in the classroom and becomes an integral part of curriculum implementation” (Kanu, 2007, p. 27). Call to action 63 specifies building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and respect; however, it must be recognized that in order to do this, schools must also build this same capacity among staff.

Now that *Calls to Action* has been released, it is necessary for schools to examine their values, beliefs, and attitudes regarding the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives. Are educators teaching about Indigenous issues as add-on topics in the curriculum, approaching topics in the same way one would teach lessons on long and short vowel sounds? Or, are schools including Indigenous perspectives in ways that promote intercultural understanding, empathy and respect? Lastly, is the need for reconciliation being discussed in classrooms? A close examination of how Indigenous education is presented and supported is crucial, particularly as schools begin to look at ways to respond to the TRC’s *Calls to Action*.

After examining teachers’ values, beliefs, and attitudes, schools then need to ensure that their practices are aligned with their values, beliefs, and attitudes. If educators believe that intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect are important values, schools need to ensure that their practices – teachings, school experiences, language and vocabulary, and teacher attitudes – allow for these traits to be cultivated. Currently, educators have an opportunity to deeply impact all students, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, through the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives “to the benefits of citizenship” (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006b, p. 1). It is not only an opportunity, but a responsibility and obligation. The inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in schools is undeniably important; but an examination of values, beliefs, attitudes, and practices must also occur, as it profoundly affects how this inclusion is implemented. Certainly, great strides have been made in the area of inclusion of Indigenous perspectives, but there is clearly more work ahead.

Inclusion: A Way to Human Flourishing

As previously mentioned, Brighthouse (2006) states that “the central purpose of education is to promote human flourishing” (p. 42), which for the purpose of this paper has been referred to as developing human capacities, capabilities, and potentials (Cherkowski & Walker, 2013). However, illustrations discussed earlier in this paper, pertaining to the IRS system, show that Indigenous students were not able to flourish in those settings as a result of the trauma associated with being taken from their families and communities, being shamed for speaking Indigenous languages, and having to endure inexcusable forms of abuse. In addition, the IRS system had damaging effects on several generations of Indigenous people who followed. Such effects continue to manifest in the lives of our current Indigenous students in psychological, social, and emotional ways, and continue to negatively affect their well-being (Bombay, Matheson, & Ainsman, 2014). Intergenerational trauma is very much present in the lives of many of Indigenous students. It is important, then, for educators to be able to acknowledge this truth and develop appropriate ways of responding in order for Indigenous students to flourish.

One way for educators to present students with tools to live flourishing lives is through the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in schools. “As it is in many societies, the goal of education in traditional Aboriginal societies was to prepare children for their lives” (Manitoba Education and Youth, 2003, p. 1). Traditional Indigenous views of education align with the view that the primary purpose of school education is to develop students’ capacities, capabilities, and potentials to live a flourishing life. “In profound and compassionate ways, Aboriginal education recognized the need for a sense of community, for balancing the development of individual self-concept and pride with a sense of responsibility and respect for the community” (Katz, 2012, p. 189). It is clear that traditional Indigenous education sought to fully develop human capacities, capabilities, and potentials. It is important, then, for educators to honour this truth by including Indigenous perspectives into classrooms in order to equip students, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, with the tools to develop their full potential.

Central to the development of flourishing lives is the need for a supportive community. One of Manitoba’s core values of inclusion is, “All students want to feel they belong and are valued” (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006b, p. 4). Building a sense of belonging within classrooms and schools creates genuine communities where students are accepted and valued. “Building student capacity to intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect” (TRC, 2015a, p. 7), found in call to action 63.iii, requires schools to become more inclusive of Indigenous perspectives in order to create environments where these qualities can be nurtured. Brighthouse (2006) explains the importance of building communities: “We also know that people are happier when they are connected to social networks. . . . Being able to spend time with, and relate intimately to, other people is a tremendously important precondition of flourishing for most of us” (p. 46). Building community is essential to the development of inclusive communities, as it provides students with a social network wherein they can receive support. This sense of safety and belonging promotes flourishing.

Creating strong, culturally inclusive, school communities also creates environments where understanding, empathy, and respect can be cultivated. Doing so responds to the TRC’s call to action 63.iii. Creating communities that are accepting, understanding, and sensitive to the needs of Indigenous students, will move all members of the school community toward reconciliation. Building intercultural understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and learning about

Indigenous perspectives can provide students with many skills needed to develop their full capacities, capabilities, and potentials. These inclusive communities are the types of communities that promote human flourishing.

Conclusion

The IRS system represented a gross disregard for Indigenous culture and languages. Children who attended these institutions were mistreated and abused. They were prevented from practicing their culture, speaking their languages, and were forced to assimilate into the dominant culture at the time. These institutions caused enormous damage in the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The Canadian government is currently taking steps toward reconciliation and the Calls to Action released by the TRC in 2015 provide ways that all Canadians can move toward reconciliation.

Manitoba Education supports a philosophy of inclusion which ensures that students who may be excluded due to social or learning barriers are able to receive appropriate education in school environments that will allow them to flourish. Although this may refer to students with exceptionalities, it is important to consider that the intergenerational trauma associated with IRS has caused many challenges for Indigenous students, as they also experience deep social and learning barriers. “Through recognition and support, an inclusive community provides meaning involvement and equal access to the benefits of citizenship” (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006b, p. 1). Educators have the responsibility of ensuring that all students receive an appropriate education, so provisions must also be made in order for Indigenous students to develop their full capacities, capabilities, and potentials.

A philosophy of inclusion, pertaining to the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives, has many benefits. It is beneficial to all students, as it promotes understanding and respect, and creates opportunities to build positive relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. This cultural inclusion conveys the message that Indigenous perspectives are valued, which can also have a great impact on the greater society, as more students enter adulthood with an understanding of Canada’s history and the challenges Indigenous people face. In addition, the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives answers call to action 63.iii, as it calls upon educators to create environments where intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect can be fostered. Finally, if the “central purpose of education is to promote human flourishing” (Brighouse, 2006, p. 42), then it is crucial for educators to include Indigenous perspectives into their teaching, as it provides students with tools to develop their own human capacities, capabilities, and potentials. It is clear that inclusion, as it relates to Indigenous perspectives, will enhance educational experiences in very real and meaningful ways for all students.

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Chapter 4

Words Fall to the Ground: The TRC's Calls to Action and the Colonization of Indigenous Story-telling

MATTHEW REIMER

The *Calls to Action* published by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC, 2015a) represents an important moment in the history of Canadian education. Addressing and redressing the tragedy of residential schools is no small task, and so it is no wonder that the suggestions it provides are numerous and far-reaching. More specifically, the changes to the education system that it outlines are both transformative and productive, and there are embedded in the *Calls to Action* a number of propositions that require deep reflection of teachers on both the pedagogic and personal level. I am particularly interested in considering something that seems to underlie many of the calls made when it comes to both “Education” (pp. 1-2) and “Education for Reconciliation” (pp. 6-7): How is the idea of story-telling reflected within the *Calls to Action*? I am directly relating story-telling to the cultures that create it. I need to make clear that I distinguish between traditional Indigenous story-telling and Western, non-Indigenous story-telling. The relationship between culture and story is as complicated and rich as the representations of Indigenous story-telling within the Canadian school system are fraught. Below I would like to consider these notions through a theoretical lens, but also through fictional narratives of my own creation. My hope is that the layers of ideology, discourse, and colonization that compose the walls being broken down by the TRC can be further dismantled through a closer look at story-telling as a mechanism of both repression and change within the Canadian educational landscape.

Narrative Interpretations

The following stories are meant to be read as entry points into the dialogue initiated by the TRC, and as responses to the thinking outlined in its *Calls to Action*. They represent extensions of understanding for non-Indigenous Canadians who seek them, and perhaps contain entirely new themes for those who approach the topic of residential schools and colonization with certain cultural biases that limit their thinking. I do not pretend to know what is best, and as a result I have framed my stories as abstractions with many interpretive ways in and out.



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Our Minotaur

In the woods a labyrinth was carved roughly into the exposed pre-Cambrian shield by strangers who came with hammer and chisel. The strangers marveled at its beauty and remarked on how it would change the lives of the people who were already there. Though the people from that place had been there for centuries and knew the land well, the labyrinth was a new and unwelcome confusion for its entrance blocked the way out of their town. And so it was that the people there became lost in the high walls of the labyrinth whenever they tried to venture out. Stories began to surface of creatures that lived deep in the bowels of the maze; harsh, snarling creatures that chased the people out and wore down their happiness to almost nothing and darkened their futures with nightmarish visions. The maze was one of loneliness. Worse, the people spent so much time trying to find a way out of the labyrinth set before them that they forgot about the things that mattered in their town: children, crops, houses, song and laughter; all were abandoned in favour of an exit. Over time, the wind and the rain wore the walls of the labyrinth down so that people could eventually see the labyrinth for what it was. The creatures that dwelled deep in the maze were cowardly and ran once the sun shone down on them. And yet, even though the maze was now conquered and the people could find their way freely, a great sadness swept over the town. Their children were parentless; their homes were decrepit, their songs were forgotten, and their crops were dead in the barren ground. For the truth was that the maze was now inside of the people, and this was a labyrinth they could not escape. So used were they to looking outward and surviving the trials of the worn-away labyrinth that the thought of facing another, more insidious warren was too much. Some even began to rebuild the walls of the original maze to mask their pain. The children looked on, hollow-eyed and hungry for love.

A pervasive sense of loneliness and isolation permeated Canada's residential schools. As one survivor recalls in the TRC's *The Survivors Speak* (2015b), "[the] biggest thing I remember from the school was that I was lonely. I was surrounded by people all the time, but I was alone. And it took me a long time to acknowledge that I do live in a loving community" (p.112). This loneliness was unquestionably internalized by students at the schools. The intention seemed to be one of separation from Indigenous culture and communities; this severing became a part of not only the students' days and nights, but their identities as well. Another survivor notes: "everything that, I think, happened in the residential schools, we picked it up: we didn't get any hugs; you ain't gonna get one from me I'll tell you that" (TRC, 2015b, p.114). This internalization had lasting and devastating effects on Indigenous communities across Canada. While the schools' pedagogy was one of assimilation, the things that were actually taught - the things that had a lasting impact - were far more tragic. Many students developed survival techniques that were very difficult to shake even after their experiences at residential school were over:

I learned how to lie, to lie so that I will get away with whatever Sister wanted me to do and that whatever she wanted to hear, that's what I told her even if it was a lie. So it got easier and I got pretty good at lying and I had a real time to get out of that lying as I got older in life to be able to tell the truth and to know the difference of what was happening

because of that lie that it became such a habit for me. I had a real hard time even after I left the residential school. (IRC, 2015b, p.119)

What is left then, when a child has no one to nurture them? No one to teach them how to love and be loved? That unhappiness trickles through generations like spilled water on floorboards; through the cracks, and down, down, down. Unnoticed or disregarded, loneliness becomes the burden of an entire people.

Entanglement

Two foresters were sitting atop a hill, looking down on their respective plots of land that sat next to one another. Their copses were thick with trees, and they were relatively happy in their work. While they were lifelong friends, they both had differing ideas about farming and how it should be done. Sitting there that evening, they began to talk about how the next few years of work would look. The first forester said, "I think that as I cut down the trees on my property, I'm going to replant them in a much more organized way. I've had enough of contending with this natural forest. From now on, I'd like to be able to see from one end of my property to the other." The second thought about what his friend had said then replied, "I don't think that's how it ought to be done. The way these forests look today is the way our ancestors saw them when they first settled here. While the natural forest is more challenging to harvest, there is something dangerous about taking the beauty and rusticity out of our land." They talked a little longer, then parted ways for the night. As the years passed, the first forester stuck to his promise. Rather than simply throwing the seeds out haphazardly once he had cut down developed trees, he planned rigorously and took care in aligning his saplings in neat rows. The second forester continued on as he had before, letting the seeds fly where they might and maintaining a natural forest on his land. For a while, the first forester would bring his friend over to his property and show him the marvels of his mathematical work. He could indeed see from one end of his property to the other, and his work was more efficient as a result. He snickered at his friends' resistance to change and encouraged him to follow his lead. The second forester refused, saying that what had been good for centuries surely could not be wrong. Over time, the bravado of the first forester began to diminish. He started to recognize that his work had lost something. It felt as though he toiled in a factory now, and the soul of his land had somehow disappeared. Peering down the rows of trees, he now wished for a profusion of branches to block his line of sight. He didn't hear the chirping and whirring of birds as he might have in the past, and the skittering of mystery rodents in the tall grass was absent. It all felt cold, and working everyday became more and more of a chore. Finally, when he could take it no longer, he took his bag of seeds up to the top of the hill and threw them up into the wind. They scattered and danced their way to the ground in no particular fashion. He threw the empty burlap to the ground, sat down on the grass and sighed. His friend, the second forester, never saw this happen. He was working contentedly in his entanglement of trees, and from where he stood he could not see the hill.

Canada's 1969 White Paper on the dismantling of the Indian Act teased out a troubling question that Dr. Rose Charlie, Indigenous scholar and feminist, recalls from her memory of that time: "don't you want... wouldn't it be wonderful for you Indian people to be the same as the other people in the general society?" (University of British Columbia, 2009). The White Paper proposed a dismantling of the difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous, vying rather for an assimilatory *equality* among Canada's peoples. Such essentialism was met with an understandable amount of wariness and suspicion from Aboriginal communities. What difference meant, for the White Paper and for Indigenous people, had everything to do with one's subject position. Difference, from the lens of Canada's government of the late 1960s, was something to be abolished - through residential schools, policy, and political maneuvering. Indigenous people, on the other hand, "saw the [White Paper's] imposed form of 'equality' as a coffin for their collective identities - the end of their existence as distinct peoples" (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2010).

For residential school students, identity was a tenuous and fragile thing. Consider the general character of the residential school, as described in TRC (2015b):

The assault on Aboriginal identity usually began the moment the child took the first step across the school's threshold. Braided hair (which often had spiritual significance) was cut, homemade traditional clothing was exchanged for a school uniform, Aboriginal names were replaced with Euro-Canadian ones (and a number), and the freedom of life in their own communities was forgone for the regimen of an institution in which every activity from morning to night was scheduled. (pp. vi-vii)

In this environment, the stories and discourses that shaped them - their names, their hand-made clothing, the routine of their days - were superseded by the stories of the colonizer. Does equality infer erasure? Is equality defined by conformity? As one survivor, Thaddee Andre, explains, it becomes a very confusing enterprise: "[I wanted] to resemble the white man, then in the mean time [*sic*], they are trying by all means to strip you of who you are as an Innu. When you are young, you are not aware of what you are losing as a human being" (TRC, 2015b, p. 56). It might feel as though the ground were slipping out from beneath your feet, that the memories you thought you had were dreams or, even worse, not really there at all. It might feel as though you were transparent, see-through, empty.

The Wanderer

A storyteller was lost in the desert, far from her home. She had been tasked with trekking across the wasteland to share her people's stories with the strangers on the other side. Her intention was to learn of their stories as well, and to bring them back to share with her kin. Wandering in the desert and near death, she came suddenly upon a strange and miraculous sight. Standing amongst the dunes, rising from the sand like some monolith, was a brick building with many windows. Stumbling toward it in the deafening heat of the sand, the woman licked her cracked lips and stared excitedly at the quiet cool that awaited her. She was able to find relief even before she arrived, as the shadow that the building cast was chilled and dark. She walked there, staring up at the strange and surreal sight. As she got closer, the bricks that had seemed to glisten in the desert sun began to take on a different character. Pocked and worn, it became clear to

the woman that this building had been standing stubbornly against the elements for centuries. Its age and power struck awe in her heart, and she was suddenly afraid. Just then the doors shook open and a woman in strange garb drifted out. She beckoned the wanderer toward her; in her hands she held a sweating jug of cold, glistening water. The storyteller forgot her fears and stumbled up the stairs. She accepted the jug with a hurried smile and drank heartily from its depths. Then, sitting upon the granite, she spoke to the woman in the strange garb. They could not understand one another, no matter how they tried. Finally, out of polite frustration, the stranger invited the wanderer into the building with a wave of her arm. Perhaps, the storyteller thought, she could find understanding within its walls. Inside, once her eyes had become accustomed to the dusty dimness, she was met with a marvelous sight. In every direction, up to the ceiling, down corridors to her left and right, were shelves and shelves of strange artifacts. Looking to the stranger, the storyteller reached out and took one off the shelf. She held it in her hands. She felt its edges with her fingers, and to her amazement, when she pulled at its corners, it opened into a thousand connected pieces. Each thin compartment was covered, back and front, with unfamiliar designs. They were dizzying, and soon seemed to slide off their surfaces amidst the storyteller's confusion. What madness was this? What infinite intricacies awaited her in these halls? She looked up from the artifact at the stranger, who waited expectantly at her side. "Stories," the woman in the strange garb said with a sweep of her arm toward the rest of the artifacts, but the storyteller knew not what she spoke of.

There was no room for difference in the residential school, and surely no room for dialogue. If any sort of conversation was permitted, it was in English and decidedly one-sided, as Jeanette Basil Laloche recalls:

Then, they explained to us the Pentecost. Then he said: "the Apostles had tongues of fire on the top of the head, then they started speaking all languages." Then there I said: "No, no, they didn't speak my language." Then there, he insisted, he said: "Yes, Jeanette, they spoke your language." I said: "No, it is impossible that they could have spoken my language." (IRC, 2015b, p.57)

Here, Laloche's denial is representative of a far more wide-spread breakdown of cultural confidence and internalized respect. She could not imagine a world where Indigenous and non-Indigenous discourse could co-exist side by side. When Indigenous culture was permitted, it was done so in the context of parody or spectacle. Gordon James Pemmican remembers being forced to put on "little powwows" for the staff of Blue Quills school in Sioux Lookout: "[they'd] make us do some of the things that was culturally done, eh, but to turn it around and make it look like it was more of a joke than anything else" (IRC, 2015b, p. 57). The language that framed Indigenous discursive practices was systematically alienated, and so - to both the Indigenous students and the non-Indigenous staff - esteemed cultural practices, like dance and story, seemed hollow and disengaged.

A Theoretical Foundation: Narrative, Discourse, and Power

How do we tell stories in school? What types of narratives do we utilize within the educational system? Identifying them is a bit more nuanced than one might first think, especially when one starts to consider the idea of narratives that exist beyond the curriculum and the lessons we use to teach it. What is important here is conceptualizing a slightly different definition of narrative. Stories are an important part of any cultural heritage. They reflect the values and traditions a group of people hold dear, and can also be read cumulatively and individually as maps of social history. The ebbs and flows of change within a culture represent something more generally important about story: it can never be considered as static. Narrative is in some way always tied to the language and culture that create it. Take Mikhail Bakhtin's (2001) definition of language from "Discourse in the Novel" as a stepping stone: "we are taking language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion" (p. 1218). Here, language is not just separate from the world and people that it describes, but is also a product of that world and those people. Thus, the stories that are spoken and written are irrevocably tied to this oscillation that language lives within, between naming the world and constraining (and controlling) it with names.

It is in this context of meaning-making and categorization that story is used by people to make sense of the world around them. This function of story-telling is an example of discourse in action. While her work is in the context of social welfare, Iara Lessa's (2006) definition of a Foucauldian discourse is pertinent here. For Foucault and Lessa discourse is understood

as systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of actions, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak. [Foucault] traces the role of discourses in wider social processes of legitimation and power, emphasizing the constitution of current truths, how they are maintained and what power relations they carry with them. (Lessa, 2006, p. 285)

Thus, for better or for worse, we can look at the stories of a group of people as a discourse that simultaneously limits and shapes their understanding of the world while also constructing a sense of identity within those constraints. Stories construct both the truths a people value and the subjectivities that are created as a result of those truths. They often differentiate between that which is acceptable and that which is unacceptable within a culture; many Western folk tales describe social transgressions and their unfortunate results. (One need only think as far as the three little pigs' unwillingness to work hard, or the prince and the pauper's failed class experiment.)

Stories, as Michel Foucault found in his 1970 lecture "The order of discourse" (Foucault, 1981), are, in their ability to name what is "right" and what is "wrong", at the same time a means of gaining and maintaining power. Consider *who* does the controlling, selection, and distribution in the following quote:

in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality. (Foucault, 1981, p. 52)

This might very well be the crux of my argument: the prohibitions and exclusions that stories - and discourse more generally - impose on a culture are not mutually decided upon. As Foucault notes later in his lecture, “discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized” (Foucault, 1981, p. 52). In the context of the residential schools, all the power lay in the hands of the colonizers. The stories that Indigenous students were told, the lessons they were made to internalize, and even the ways in which their own traditional stories were demonized and prohibited, were surely representations of this discursive power struggle at work. Foucault held strong beliefs about the function of education, and the ways in which some voices were privileged while others were silenced: “any system of education is a political way of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourses, along with the knowledges and powers which they carry” (Foucault, 1981, p. 64). Foucault spends little time in his lecture discussing the human implications of his theory, though in the context of residential schools and their colonizer-colonized binary, a very tragic human story begins to emerge. To not be able to name the world in one’s own terms, through one’s own stories, is a spiritual disenfranchisement with far-reaching effects. When things are named *for you*, and worse, when the names that you had for things before are taken away, it is identity itself that is being colonized.

The importance of story-telling in First Nations culture cannot be understated, as Katarzyna Juchnowicz explains in “Reflections of oral traditions in contemporary native writing: Ruby Slipperjack’s *Honour the Sun*” (Juchnowicz, 2008):

Storytelling long predates the arrival of the Europeans in North America, and it has always accompanied the lives of Native peoples as it anchors memories, links generations, places, as well as times. In traditional societies, stories form perhaps the most important available model of instruction. The purpose of telling them is... to *integrate*, to *educate*, and to *entertain* all the peoples. (p. 270)

Juchnowicz paints a picture of a world view grounded in orality. The weight of stories holds generations, culture, and identities together. As she points out, it was for Indigenous people the most natural and effective means of education. Most importantly, the nature of orality requires a continuous generational chain of recognition - when that chain is broken, so too are the bonding memories that hold a people together. When we apply the above theories of discourse to Juchnowicz’s characterization we are left with a strong sense of just how important story-telling was to shaping an understanding of the world for Indigenous people. Surely, power was at work in the privileging of some stories over others, and also in the themes that were celebrated within oral tales. However, the externally-motivated and strategic erasure of an entire tradition by European colonizers did not just rewire how power works within Indigenous discourse; instead, it shook and eroded the very discursive ground that entire societies were meant to stand on.

Scholars of discourse analysis, along with postcolonial theorists, refer to this forcible reconstruction of identity as “epistemic violence” - replacing one set of beliefs with another (Spivak, 2001, p. 2197). Discourse analysis might look at this happening in a large, structural sense - consider the way ideology frames larger social themes like difference or racism - while postcolonialists place such violence within the individual; within the identities of the colonized. As Paula Gunn Allen, the American Indigenous feminist and scholar explains in “Kochinnenako in Academe” (Gunn Allen, 1986/2001),

the oral tradition is more than a record of a people's culture. It is the creative source of their collective and individual selves. When that wellspring of identity is tampered with, the sense of the self is also tampered with; and when that tampering includes the... assumptions of the white world within the body of an Indian tradition, serious consequences necessarily ensue. (p. 2110)

These serious consequences are being experienced right now in Canada. What they are, in specific terms, Gunn Allen does not elaborate. I think we can turn on the television or look to the streets of our own cities if we are searching for evidence of this tampering. In a more general sense, Gunn Allen discusses how the embedding of "European, classist, conflict-centered patriarchal assumptions" within Indigenous culture is really an attempt at correcting its perceived weaknesses (p. 2111). These weaknesses are deeply discursive and historical, as Christine Ferrari (1994) explains in "Telling the tale: Merging orality and print in the fiction of Morrison and Silko":

there is very little in book culture which allows [Europeans] to conceive of [oral] cultural practices... To imagine even part of what non-written histories can do to preserve [information] ... across generations and epoch's, without storable records... has been beyond the grasp of our discursive practices. Not recognizing such oral systems, literacy has historically categorized its agents as ignorant, underdeveloped, uncivilized and savage. (p. 3)

The outside forces that characterize colonialism are only now being truly reflected upon in Canada, and the tears that they rent are only now being tended to. The TRC's (2015a) *Calls to Action* represents - in part - a reclaiming of the voices that were lost to residential schools.

Conclusions

How do we tell stories in school? Perhaps, through the course of this chapter, the answer to this question has become more complicated. It is clear that stories do matter, not only when it comes to teaching students the things delineated within curriculum, but also when it comes to sculpting senses of identity and community. In the historical records compiled by the TRC, time and again, there is mention of not only the degradation of identity within the residential schools but also the omission of traditional Indigenous story-telling. Such exclusionary tactics are reflected upon in *Canada's residential schools: The history, part 2 1939-2000* (TRC,2015c): "generally, little effort was made to look into Aboriginal cultures for sources of stories and traditions that might actually reinforce the children's sense of Aboriginal identity and disrupt the historical aim of assimilation" (p. 540). In the face of such overwhelming odds, how could Indigenous stories claim any sort of cultural or discursive ground? The omission of such stories was one thing, but the privileging of the colonizers' stories was another. While this was only one facet of the assimilatory program designed for residential schools, it was nevertheless harmful both in the context of short-term educational practices and long-term cultural retention.

I have tried, in the creation of my own stories, to be attentive to two important notions. First, that they represent an abstract approach to the idea of outside forces toying with, and gravely harming, a culture's sense of narrative and story. My stories exist outside as well - I am a non-Indigenous Canadian, educated in non-Indigenous ways. However, I have consciously tried to frame

them in a way that could shed new light on the *Calls to Action* for people who might otherwise ignore them entirely or misunderstand their intentions. My stories, whether I aim to or not, are extensions of a Western understanding of narrative. They are recognizable and contextual to a Western mindset, though they delve into issues that affect *all* Canadians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike. It's clear then, even in the reception of my stories, that where a story comes from truly matters; what a story teaches and how it teaches it are like two intermingled strands in a braid.

I also believe that the healing quality of story cannot be ignored. There is something profoundly powerful about the ability a narrative has to change people's minds and hearts. Stories are echoes of the world around them and if we are to journey down a path of healing and transformation, our stories must carry such themes. The best place for this transformative process to begin is within the educational system, as the *Calls to Action* readily indicates. Interwoven within the tenets of the TRC's document are several ideas that echo the argument above. Most important to this conversation are the calls that focus on cultural preservation and autonomy. "Developing culturally appropriate curricula" is only one facet of this, as it's also crucial to remember that "the preservation, revitalization, and strengthening of Aboriginal languages and cultures are best managed by Aboriginal people and communities" (TRC, 2015a, p. 2). Putting Indigenous education back into the hands of Indigenous people is really only the first step. For Canada's non-Indigenous people, it will be just as essential to learn through the integration of "Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods" into every classroom across the country (TRC, 2015a, p.7). Working within the dichotomy of Indigenous and non-Indigenous - without any preconceived notions or assumptions of power, but with respect and compassion - is the only way to move forward.

Words Fall to the Ground

Once a word was uttered in that place, it formed itself into a physical shape and floated whimsically about the head of the person who had said it. The shapes were varied, and often mirrored the emotion behind the word itself. Large, sharp words were anger; small, shaking words were nervousness; thin, fading words were sadness; colourful, bubbling words were happiness. Some people wandered with hardly a word around them, while others were crowded with phrases and found it difficult to see where they were going. The words that mattered most fixed themselves stubbornly in space for a long, long time; most words were easily forgotten, and could be found littering the streets before they eventually turned to dust and joined the ground beneath them. But it was the words that stayed there that began to gather more and more significance - they were noticed as the years passed and shared by all the people. That made them strong and resilient, and they burst about their edges with light and energy. In ancient and important places, people who bore those words gathered, and illuminated great cones of glass with the energy from the words. These cones shot beams of light up into the air, piercing both the day and the night. It was there that people could journey if they thought they might be forgetting the very important words. No amount of floods or earthquakes, fires or quarrels, could destroy those temples. They stood there, ageless, immovable.

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