

Consensus

Volume 37
Issue 1 *Journeying Together toward Truth and
Reconciliation*

Article 2

5-25-2016

Exploring Pathways to Reconciliation

Kathleen E. Absolon

Akiesha E. Absolon-Winchester

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus>



Part of the [Canadian History Commons](#), and the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Absolon, Kathleen E. and Absolon-Winchester, Akiesha E. (2016) "Exploring Pathways to Reconciliation," *Consensus*: Vol. 37: Iss. 1, Article 2.

DOI: 10.51644/XNHZ6209

Available at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol37/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Consensus by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

Exploring Pathways to Reconciliation

Kathleen E. Absolon* and Akiesha E. Absolon-Winchester[◇]

Exploring Pathways to Reconciliation

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was mandated to tell Canadians about the history of residential schools and the impact those schools had on Aboriginal peoples, and to guide a process of reconciliation. (Truth and Reconciliation of Canada, 2015, p. 99).

The time has come for Canadians to prepare their own pathways. In June, 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada released its' final report and accompanying 94 recommendations with Calls to Action for the Government of Canada and Educational Institutions. These Calls to Action implicate all citizens in Canada, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. As conversations, dialogues, awareness, understanding and action emerge from these Calls to Action, we are ourselves called to reflect upon reconciliation and what that means to each of us in our selves, within family, community, profession and society. In this article, we will be exploring pathways to reconciliation from our perspectives as Indigenous social work practitioners and within family as mother and daughter. Like our title suggests, the pathways to reconciliation in this context are narrow and less travelled. We believe reconciliation in the Indigenous / Settler / Institutions / Church / Government relations is still to be actualized.

In this article we will account for the contextual history and current realities of colonization in order to put into accurate context what we are trying to reconcile from. Accounting for history is crucial in matters of systemic cultural genocide and its' aftermath. The section following history is informed by a recent presentation Akiesha offered to a group of non-Indigenous learners in the field of Social Work on reconciliation; it was from this experience that we realized that this message was relevant and meaningful to this article. Following Akiesha's presentation, we both discussed reconciliation and the important messages to offer non-Indigenous practitioners. Another theme that had come up in our discussions was the notion of cultural humility, and the idea that cultural humility is an important artery toward understanding truths and reconciliation. Finally, we each offer concluding thoughts from our perspectives as mother and daughter with reflections from our ongoing journey through truth and reconciliation within a family living the legacy of the

* Associate Dean and Associate Professor, Aboriginal Field of Study, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University. Waterloo, ON.

[◇] Aboriginal Child and Youth Mental Health Clinician, Wholistic Child and Youth. White Owl Native Ancestry Association. Kitchener, ON.

Indian Residential School system. The intergenerational impacts of the Indian Residential School (IRS) on families is well documented and recorded through efforts of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples[†] the Aboriginal Healing Foundation[‡] and the more recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. This article is a living example of reconciliation: healing, resistance and resilience. We are mother and daughter authors whose journey is one of recovery from the impacts of the IRS system and whose passions rest in the healing and wellness of Indigenous peoples through education and social work.

We begin by offering our social location in order to acknowledge our experiences and journeys out of the impacts of the legacies from the Indian Residential School system. We are not neutral and our subjective locations will let readers know that our voices on reconciliation are impacted by a traumatic history.

Akiesha: Aaniin, Giizhigokwe n'dishnaukauz. Waubshizii n'dodem. Kakatoosh n'donjibaa. Greetings, my Anishinaabe name translates to mean Sky Woman and I am Marten Clan from Flying Post First Nation. I also carry European and Acadian ancestry. I am the granddaughter of Jennie and David Absolon and the daughter of Kathy (Kathleen, Minogiizhigokwe) Absolon and Tony Winchester. My grandmother, Jennie, was a stolen child in the St. Johns Anglican Indian Residential School in Chapleau, Ontario for 10 years. My grandmother's experience directly informs my own encounter with the legacy of the Indian Residential School system. This is inherent in the fragmentation of my own family and self throughout time as well as the acts of healing, resilience, and reclamation. Each piece of my being in this context informs my direct and inherent experience of reconciliation and healing through resilience and resistance. As a demonstration of reconciliation within relationships, it is an honor to be co-authoring this article with my mother.

Kathy: Aaniin I am Minogiizhigokwe (Shining Day Woman) and I am Akiesha's proud mother and the daughter of Jennie Absolon (Anishinaabe) and David Absolon (British). I too am thrilled to be co-authoring this article with my *daanis* (daughter), Akiesha. My mother, under the Federal governments' aggressive policies of assimilation, was taken from her parents (my grandparents) and siblings to attend the Anglican residential school. This violent dismemberment in her life needless to say was traumatic and has left lasting repercussions in our family. My Grandparents were forced to hand their four children over to the Indian Agent one after the other. My grandparents were wounded as a result. From that time, the fragmentation in our family left each member alone, isolated, and alienated from one another, their community, the culture, and themselves. In sharing this, I do not seek pity, guilt or blame; I seek restitution and reconciliation. I seek understanding of my pain, anger and trauma. I seek restitution in terms of redistribution of resources and lands so that we have equal access and benefits of our Mother Earth. I want a redistribution of resources

[†] For the Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples online go to: http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/webarchives/20071115053257/http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/sgmm_e.html

[‡] See www.ahf.ca for the research series and publications.

so there is equality and fairness for Indigenous children and their families. I want to be able to have ceremony; meanwhile there is no space – especially in urban centers. I want to speak my language fluently. The truth is that I want my family back, a healthy family. I wanted to learn from my Grandparents and I wanted to know where I came from. My heart aches with how much of our relationships, culture and language was assaulted and now we struggle to find ourselves. Now I seek reconciliation within self, family and community in restoring, reclaiming and recovering as much of our cultural knowledge, teachings, and way of life as I can in my short life. I wish to restore what my grandparents and Creator intended for us to know in a good life and leave good foot prints for my children and grandchildren seven generations from now. With this I am thrilled to have my daughter accept my invitation to co-author.

History and then came Her-story: Our Truths

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. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p, 11).

Still today many people are unaware of Indigenous peoples' rich cultural presence or the colonial history in Canada. Disbelief and shock are common with responses like "How could this happen in this country?" or "I had no idea!" People think at least they tried to provide education and what happened was a reflection of the time. Ignorance and apathy are common responses and the education system is the culprit in propagating ignorance to maintain societal apathy. We call readers to action to dutifully remedy their ignorance and apathy by reading the Truth and Reconciliation, 2015 report and continue reading and learning toward understanding. Understanding and knowledge builds compassion and we agree education will be the foundation of reconciliation. However, we cannot assume readers have this understanding and include our history in our article. Because we cannot assume readers are aware or have read the TRC report we include excerpts of it throughout our article.

In Canada the presence of the colonial story is boastful in the colonial name of cookies, newspapers, streets and roads. The presence of pioneer villages and settler stories on T.V., and in museums and history books further entrench a one sided story of nice settlers coming to empty lands ("*terra nullius*") with uncivilized savage peoples waiting to be discovered and tamed. This story has not helped us and what is problematic is that the Indigenous peoples'

stories, experiences, and presence is generally absent and omitted. The Indigenous peoples' story and truth has been absent for too long now. Colonization was about land and natural resource extraction and while Indigenous peoples' relationship to the land is equivalent to one's relationship to their mother, this became problematic to the colonizer.

The mere presence of Indigenous people in these newly colonized lands blocked settler access to the land. To gain control of the land of Indigenous people, colonists negotiated Treaties, waged wars of extinction, eliminated traditional landholding practices, disrupted families, and imposed a political and spiritual order that came complete with new values and cultural practices. (TRC, 2015 p. 17).

To address the "Indian problem" colonizing policies were mandated and directed to civilize and Christianise the "Indian" out of the child. These aggressive efforts to erase Indigenous peoples' connections to the land and our life source were enacted through residential schools, land dispossessions, creation of reservations systems and increased social, political and economic disempowerment. Indian Residential Schools were not intended to create educational opportunities for Indigenous children, they were intended to domesticate, re-socialize and disconnect the children from their Indigenous values and worldviews.

Roman Catholic, Anglican, United, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches were the major denominations involved in the administration of the residential school system. The government's partnership with the churches remained in place until 1969, and, although most of the schools had closed by the 1980s, the last federally supported residential schools remained in operation until the late 1990s." (TRC, 2015, p. 6).

The history from pre-Confederation boarding and industrial schools to mandatory attendance at residential schools spans from the 1800's into the dawn of the millennium. The role of the churches as accomplices to Governments policies of cultural genocide is undeniable. Justice Murray Sinclair (2015) says that residential school system under the guise of education was the main culprit to enact policies of cultural genocide and therefore education is again responsible for restoring truths and laying foundation for reconciliation. Churches also have a role in restitution and reconciliation by sharing their wealth of resources and land acquisitions.

Despite incomprehensible and vast efforts to re-socialize Indigenous children in inhumane and traumatic ways, the resistance and resilience of survivors and their families is documented and evident today. Colonization through residential schools could not sever our spiritual ties to Creation and our Creator. An Indigenous worldviews contains a sacred connection to Creation and our Creator. Since the 1960's Indigenous peoples have been mobilizing movements for change. The evolution of the TRC reflects an already existing pathway that has been in the making for decades now. The TRC report and other important

reports are speaking our truth about the devastating impacts of colonization and its policies of cultural genocide in our lives and we continue to stand up for our mother earth, the land and her resources.

The impacts are no longer secret. The truths are out and we are a people recovering and healing from this trauma. This is both of our stories. Please understand this history and its impact. Indigenous peoples never surrendered, nor were we passive recipients to this history of cultural genocide. For example,

During the years in which the federal government was slowly closing the residential school system, Aboriginal people across the country were establishing effective regional and national organizations. In the courts and the legislatures, they argued for the recognition of Aboriginal rights, particularly the right to self-government. They forced the government to withdraw its 1969 White Paper that aimed at terminating Aboriginal rights, they placed the settling of land claims on the national agenda, ensured that Aboriginal rights were entrenched in the Constitution, and saw the creation of a new jurisdiction within Canada—the territory of Nunavut—with an Inuit majority population. These developments were part of a global movement asserting the rights of Indigenous peoples. Canadian Aboriginal leaders played a key role in this movement. For example, they were central in the creation of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples in 1975. The work of the council laid the groundwork for the 2007 *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. (TRC, 2015, p. 98).

And the response from some of the churches is hopeful:

From the 1960s onwards, many people within the churches began to re-evaluate both the broader history of the relations between the churches and Aboriginal peoples, and the specific history of the residential schools. Many church organizations provided support to Aboriginal campaigns on such issues as land and Treaty rights. In the 1980s, the churches began to issue apologies to Aboriginal people. One of the first of these, issued in 1986 by the United Church of Canada, focused on the destructive impact that church missionary work had on Aboriginal culture. The Oblate order offered an apology in 1991 that referred to the residential schools. Apologies relating specifically to their roles in operating residential schools were issued by the Anglicans in 1993, the Presbyterians in 1994, and the United Church in 1998. (TRC, 2015, p. 98).

At individual levels to class action law suits truth telling became inevitable:

Aboriginal people also began both individually and collectively to push for the prosecution of individuals who had abused students at residential schools and for compensation for former students. In 1987, Nora Bernard, a former student of the Shubenacadie residential school, began interviewing fellow Survivors in the kitchen

of her home in Truro, Nova Scotia. In 1995, she formed the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School Survivors Association and started registering Survivors.

Former students also filed lawsuits against the federal government and the churches over the treatment that they received in the schools. ... By October 2001, more than 8,500 residential school Survivors had filed lawsuits against the federal government, the churches, related organizations, and, where possible, the individual who committed the abuse. By 2005, it was estimated that the volume surpassed 18,000 lawsuits. Former students also commenced class-action lawsuits for compensation. ... Within months, the federal government agreed to enter into a process intended to negotiate a settlement to the growing number of class-action suits. The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (irssa) was reached in 2006 and approved by the courts in the following year. The irssa has five main components: 1) a Common Experience Payment; 2) an Independent Assessment Process; 3) support for the Aboriginal Health Foundation; 4) support for residential school commemoration; and 5) the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. ... Funding was also provided to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation to support initiatives addressing the residential school legacy. (TRC, 2015, p. 98 & 99).

And in June 2008,

Harper said, "These objectives were based on the assumption Aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal. Indeed, some sought, as it was infamously said, 'to kill the Indian in the child.' Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country."(p.99-100).

Ever evolving and pushing forward, Indigenous peoples resistance and insistence on justice led a pathway to the Settlement Agreements and the TRC. We, Indigenous peoples fought for the right to be Indigenous and we struggle to restore what these schools have destroyed. For Indigenous peoples, this colonial history is up close and personal. The impacts of this history and current experiences are so close to our hearts and lived experiences that we still are grieving, wounded and traumatized.

The Indian residential school has left a legacy and this legacy is evident in disproportionate rates of socio economic status, mortality, education, incarceration, addictions and general levels of functioning and wellbeing. The impact being dismembered from oneself, culture, parents and siblings has created a legacy of intergenerational trauma and unresolved grief and loss at spiritual, emotional, mental and physical levels. We can attest to this while we struggle and work to restore our spiritual, emotional, mental and physical selves. This legacy of trauma continues to plague our relationships and communities today. Further to internalized trauma in people is the internalized legacy in policy and institutions.

The beliefs and attitudes that were used to justify the establishment of residential schools are not things of the past: they continue to animate official Aboriginal policy today. Reconciliation will require more than apologies for the shortcomings of those who preceded us. It obliges us to recognize the ways in which the legacy of residential schools continues to disfigure Canadian life and to abandon policies and approaches that currently serve to extend that hurtful legacy. (TRC, 2015, p. 104).

The layers of the legacy of IRS are complex and intertwined throughout institutions and entrenched in policy. We still believe and agree with Justice Sinclair that education holds the key to reconciliation. Acknowledging the reality of the history and its legacy is crucial in understanding the context of reconciliation. We deeply wish readers to understand the real impacts of the legacies of trauma such as, mistrust, fear, suspicion, anger, hurt, depression, anxiety, and violence. Indian residential schools and other aggressive policies of assimilation by the Government of Canada and associated religious institutions left Indigenous children and generations to follow with deep wounds and scars in themselves, their family kinship systems, and communities. The undeniable fact in any relationship where domination, violence, and disempowerment characterize a relationship is that reconciliation will not come easily; rather, it will be challenging and requires space and time for the truth telling to be shared and listened to with humility, courage, honesty, and bravery.

Understanding colonizer / colonized contradiction is important in coming to understand authentic reconciliation within the context of the history of colonization in Canada. Reconciliation is simply not the act of “making up” or whatever one might attribute to the meaning of reconciliation. Rather, reconciliation is far more complicated with layers of meaning, interpretation, and pathways. There will be more likelihood of fragmented versions and diverse pathways toward reconciliation. We cannot offer a succinct definition of reconciliation within this context as of yet. Reconciliation in meaning and interpretation will vary and depend on who, where, when, how, and why. The intentions behind reconciliation will guide and impact its’ outcome. We are all colonized peoples and have internalized notions of who we are depending on where we are located in the colonized or colonizer spectrum. Do we have power and privilege or no power and are oppressed? The point at which reconciliation will begin to be explored on the continuum of diverse meanings and interpretations will be different for everyone depending on their location.

As Indigenous women, we have internalized feelings of inferiority in relation to our location in society (Monchalin, 2016). Lisa Monchalin in *The Colonial Problem. An Indigenous Perspective on Crime and Injustice in Canada* thoroughly illustrates the vulnerabilities of Indigenous women in a colonial violent society and I encourage readers to review it to understand the issues that confront Indigenous women. Decolonizing in this context means that we must work through issues of safety, low self-worth, insecurity, and powerlessness toward strengthening, restoring and reclaiming our value and presence in society and

Creation. The history of colonization has done everything in its' power to diminish and exterminate our place, worth, position, and power. Movements such as the Idle No More and Sisters in Spirit are actions representative of restoring Indigenous women's presence while addressing the injustices and violence toward Indigenous women. While commissions and research foundations work is to tell the world of the oppression and dehumanization of Indigenous peoples. Paulo Freire's says decolonizing has two distinct stages. The first relates to Indigenous people's movements to unveiling "the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation" (2008, p. 54). The second is when "the reality of oppression has already been transformed, this pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation" (2008, p. 54). He further states,

violence is initiated by those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognize others as persons-not by those who are oppressed, exploited, and unrecognized. It is not the unloved who initiate disaffection, but those who cannot love because they love only themselves. It is not the helpless, subject to terror, who initiate terror, but the violent, who with their power create the concrete situation which begets the "rejects of life." ...It is not those whose humanity is denied them who negate humankind, but those who denied that humanity (thus negating their own as well). (2008, p. 55).

Consequently, Indigenous peoples decolonization is about reclaiming self, family, voice, presence, power, worth, identity, land, language, community and nation. Decolonization has been a process of reconciliation with self, family, nation, and one's cultural identity. For indigenous peoples, decolonizing is about transformation of oneself out of internalized colonialism toward reclaiming ones' Indigeneity. There is a resurgence of Indigenous knowledge, traditions and teachings (Simpson, 2011). We are healing and reclaiming our strength and resilience as peoples. Reconciliation has been about working through the negative and destructive impacts of cultural genocide in our internal and external relationships. Conversely, decolonizing methodologies in education, social work and research all for a critical encounter with both ideas and actions problematizing imperialistic frameworks where doing for, or on, our behalf are in question (Gray, Coates, Yellow Bird & Hetherinton, 2013). Decolonizing practice is a conscious shift in power imbalances in solidarity with Indigenous peoples.

For members of the oppressed group, decolonizing is unnerving and is a process as Paulette Regan's work and shared journey evidences in *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools Truth Telling, Reconciliation in Canada* (Regan, 2010). Decolonizing and reconciling is about confronting one's own internalized location as a settler in colonized lands and confronting the truths of this violence and its' aftermath in the lives of Indigenous peoples. Colonialism is intrinsic to the colonizers' language and decolonizing also means revisiting terms and language (Wa Thiongo, 1986). De-colonizing is to become conscious and

to work to reverse internalized values and beliefs that lead to the subjugation of Indigenous peoples. Ask yourself: Whose ancestors' territories am I on? What part have I unconsciously and ignorantly played? What am I willing to do? What am I willing to give up or share? Truth telling is not just about hearing the stories of the atrocities of the victims of violence and trauma; but also about confronting the unsettling truths of systemic culprits and agents of colonial violence. Paulette Regan's work is humble and courageous where she writes about her own decolonizing journey in learning and engaging with survivors and their stories of IRS experiences and legacies. Her contribution is not of survivor's stories but of her own unsettling and critical encounter with self in a decolonizing, unsettling and truth finding. She sets forth a meaningful example and we encourage readers to seek out her work to further understand the pathways of decolonizing from a settler perspective.

When a relationship has a history that is steeped in violence and control and reconciliation is to be explored, both parties would have to confront the history of violence and its' impacts. We aren't addressing individual relationships because there were some compassionate matrons and avenues that made residential schools bearable. We are addressing the overall relationship of colonial violence and what we mean is that each party has work to do. Perpetrators of violence or affiliates have the difficult task of owning their abuse of power and this takes humility and courage. Victims of violence and descendants have the challenge of healing and recovering from violent trauma and this too takes humility and courage. Victims of violence are less likely to see the benefits of reconciliation let alone feel safe at any level of engagement in the absence of conscientious understanding. Possibilities of reconciliation exist only when each party is willing to recover and reconcile with themselves and their truth, and restore their own humility and humanity. From this perspective, we think that pathways of reconciliation are possible, but require all parties to be on a healing journey out of their colonizer / colonized state. Decolonizing has been the term used to characterize this journey. Oppressors need to problematize notions of internalized paternalism, colonialism, power, control and supremacy. The oppressed work to decolonize notions of internalized colonialism, powerlessness, fear, subordination and inferiority because as Freire points out: "The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom" (Freire, 2008, p. 47).

Reconciliation in the absence of authentic recovery from colonization from either the vantage point of colonized or colonizer is the story of Indigenous settler relations to date. Paternalism and tokenism are examples of illusionary acts without authentic or substantive personal or political change. Freire (2008) offers readers valuable insights in understanding the journey out of internalized oppressed / oppressor dynamic. True pathways toward reconciliation are possible only when each party is open to a process of seeking their truth and recovering from the impacts of colonization. Confronting our own internalized oppressed or oppressor self is a necessary and difficult journey of truly understanding what we are reconciling from and so we do not continue to reinforce the masters' tools. We must considering and seek our truth in relation to our personal and political location in the

colonizer / colonized or oppressor / oppressed spectrum. Paulo Freire (2008, p. 56) says “the oppressed, who by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors.” As we, Indigenous peoples rehumanize and liberate ourselves, we must not replicate nor mimic our oppressors. Thus through our own healing, truth telling and reconciliation within ourselves, we teach our oppressors. This, we believe, to be a true work of love of our Creator’s intentions for humankind on our Mother Earth. The next section on reconciliation is inspired by Akiesha’s work as an Indigenous youth. We must also learn to listen to the youth and include their voice in guiding us into what is yet to come.

Exploring Reconciliation

“Together, Canadians must do more than just *talk* about reconciliation; we must learn how to *practise* reconciliation in our everyday lives—within ourselves and our families, and in our communities, governments, places of worship, schools, and workplaces. To do so constructively, Canadians must remain committed to the ongoing work of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 126).

To reconcile is to bring together. The TRC has presented a pathway for how this can happen. Reconciliation, we believe, is the mutual responsibility of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples of Canada. Reconciliation must be based on respectful relationship building with honest sharing. Strong relationships of this nature are built on truthful sharing and respectful listening, which inevitably lead to acknowledging the painful history of cultural genocide of First Nations peoples in Canada. We note that reconciliation will look different, as stated earlier depending on who is in the relationship. In any beginning process we believe beginning with discussions that explore the meaning and intention of reconciliation will help explore and create a pathway.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has produced a document published by Justice Murray Sinclair, Chief Wilton Littlechild, and Dr. Marie Wilson titled, “What We Have Learned: Principals of Truth and Reconciliation” (2015). This document begins with ten guiding principles on all (micro-, mezzo-, and macro-) levels of practice. We believe these principles to be paramount and want to reiterate them herein. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission explains, “[...] in order for Canada to flourish in the twenty-first century, reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canada must be based on the following principles” (2015, p. 3). The ten guiding principles include:

1. “The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* is the framework for reconciliation at all levels and across all sectors of Canadian society.

2. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, as the original peoples of this country and as self-determining peoples, have Treaty, constitutional, and human rights that must be recognized and respected.
3. Reconciliation is a process of healing of relationships that requires public truth sharing, apology, and commemoration that acknowledge and redress past harms.
4. Reconciliation requires constructive action on addressing the ongoing legacies of colonialism that have had destructive impacts on Aboriginal peoples' education, cultures and languages, health, child welfare, the administration of justice, and economic opportunities and prosperity.
5. Reconciliation must create a more equitable and inclusive society by closing the gaps in social, health, and economic outcomes that exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.
6. All Canadians, as Treaty peoples, share responsibility for establishing and maintaining mutually respectful relationships.
7. The perspectives and understandings of Aboriginal Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers of the ethics, concepts, and practices of reconciliation are vital to long-term reconciliation.
8. Supporting Aboriginal peoples' cultural revitalization and integrating Indigenous knowledge systems, oral histories, laws, protocols, and connections to the land into the reconciliation process are essential.
9. Reconciliation requires political will, joint leadership, trust building, accountability, and transparency, as well as a substantial investment of resources.
10. Reconciliation requires sustained public education and dialogue, including youth engagement, about the history and legacy of residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal rights, as well as the historical and contemporary contributions of Aboriginal peoples to Canadian society." (2015, p. 3-4).

These principles have been thoughtfully presented and will provide a pathway for reconciliation. However, this pathway is dependent on the participation and long-term commitment of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

It is fundamental through the process of reconciliation that the stories of the courageous children and survivors of the Indian Residential School be shared, recorded and documented. With this, comes a discomfort for non-Indigenous Canadian society. This discomfort that is often described as "white guilt", with symptoms such as guilt, shame, pity, shock, fear, helplessness, and in the worst cases an irrational ache for disbelief or desire to remain blissful in one's ignorance. The fact of the matter is that none of the symptoms of white guilt are helpful. Certainly, it is natural to feel sadness and discomfort in the wrath of

these undesirable and burdening thoughts and feelings following many of the horrific stories pertaining to the Indian Residential School era as Regan (2010) describes. Canada's history of cultural genocide is not a joyful one; it is one of destruction, sadness, loss, trauma and grief. Thus, it is important we allow ourselves to be human in the emotional discomfort of our history; however, it is not the responsibility of our generation to carry the burden of our history and the atrocities that past Canadian leaders, governing systems, and churches forced upon Indigenous people through assimilative policies; rather, is it our collective *responsibility* as a community to actively facilitate the space for learning, dialogue and positive change to occur and where respectful relationships and healing can take place.

In beginning to dismantle and decolonize our social systems, our structures, and ourselves, we believe it is not the responsibility of Indigenous peoples to solely facilitate education, reconciliation, and decolonization. The ten guiding principles set forth then guide Calls to Action with particular attention to constructive action, education and responsibility to act and wake up from this colonial coma. Canadian society ought to directly confront any sense of entitlement and take on their responsibility in reconciliation. In simply remaining idle, non-Indigenous peoples take on a bystander effect. The non-act of doing nothing inherently perpetuates and allows racism, discrimination, oppression, paternalism, domination and inequality to continue. "Most definitions describe bystanders as witnesses to negative behavior [...] who by their presence have the opportunity to step into provide help, contribute to the negative behavior or encourage it in some way, or stand by and do nothing but observe" (Banyard, 2015, p. 8). In the case of the Indian Residential School tragedy involving a large group of victimizers and oppressed, the bystanders are defined by "their apathy, or lack of action. [...] [The term] 'diffusion of responsibility' [is used] to describe why bystanders in large groups in particular, are less likely to help" (Banyard, 2015, p. 8) or less likely to do something to educate themselves and participate in shifting power structures. The bystander phenomenon is dangerous as it perpetuates violence through racism, oppression, and discrimination by avoiding, minimizing, negating and discounting the experiences of Indigenous peoples and the legacy of the Indian Residential Schools era.

Reconciliation must be wrapped in the arms of the upmost humility, love, truth, honesty, respect, bravery and wisdom. Especially in the case of relations between First Nations and non-First Nations people as it pertains to ally-ships. The oppressed is often expected to reconcile with the oppressor. Similarly, in the example illustrated in a previous section of domestic violence, society does not often expect a victim of domestic violence to solely take on the responsibility of reconciling. One cannot expect Indigenous peoples to come to the rescue of reconciling and healing Canada *for* Canada. Reconciliation is an act of unified healing and growth. The role of an ally in this function is critical and necessary. Nonetheless, an ally ought to be invited in the process toward reconciliation and holds a certain amount of high responsibility. We believe that once the Prime Minister apologized on behalf of Canada, a responsibility was bestowed on all its citizens to participate and engage in post apology actions such as recommendations outlined in the Royal Commission

on Aboriginal Peoples of 1996 and the TRC of 2015. It is written and citizens of Canada now have a responsibility to act from that Apology in June 2008. Some of this responsibility includes: acquiring education and training, voting, sharing stories, listening, facilitating the space for First Nations voices to be heard, and facilitating and honoring equal participation (socially, economically and politically). These are ways in which an ally can be effective and helpful in their role and responsibility toward reconciliation and healing. This all sounds overwhelming and daunting, so how would one possibly begin? Well, we can only stitch one bead at a time and it takes humility to begin such a journey.

The pathway of humility:

Our Anishinaabe teachings have the seven sacred Grandfather teachings to guide us to live a good life. They are humility, love, truth, honesty, respect, bravery and wisdom (Benton Benai, 1988 & Simpson, 2011). These Indigenous values and ethics have guided Indigenous peoples since Creation stories were shared and will also guide pathways of reconciliation. One of the seven Grandfather teachings is humility and to know yourself as a sacred part of Creation is to understand humility. What we mean by that is to know one self as being a part of Creation means to exist in harmony and balance within Creation not as a ruler, governor, controller or master. Human beings are dependent on the gifts of life that Creation provides such as our Mother Earth's food, medicine and water, our Grandfather Sun's fire, our Grandmother moon's love and protection, and Creator's breath that is the air. Without any one of these life givers, life ceases to exist. Humility is to understand our place in this cycle of life and walk with gentleness, calmness and meekness in our relationships within Creation.

We have come across a mainstream term *cultural humility* and this may be useful to some readers. At the dawn of the new millennium, discourses on cultural humility received attention as cross cultural training and cultural competency models in the mainstream health sectors lacked critical self-examination and understanding of social and political locations of physicians and their patients who were described as being "socio-culturally mismatched". We interpreted this to mean the physicians were White males, with power and privilege while the patients were a member of a minority and oppressed group. Melanie Tervalon, a physician and consultant and Jann Murray-Garcia, a nursing professor at UC Davis (1998) wrote about *cultural humility* in a thoughtful and philosophical manner to help physicians change. That is it helped people in positions of power approach their work with oppressed and marginalized patients and clients toward enacting respectful and relevant health services. We agree that shifting power imbalances in practice requires cultural humility. Bridging cultural humility into understanding a stance toward fostering reconciliation has merit and relevancy to aiding those in positions of power and privilege in addressing social and political gaps in the relationship dynamics (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Becoming aware of the space you occupy and your position within this space is what

Tervalon & Murray-Garcia describe as “a process that requires humility as individuals to continually engage in self-reflection and self-critique as lifelong learners and reflective practitioners” (1998, p. 118). Further they conclude “cultural humility incorporates a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and critique, to redressing the power imbalances in the physician-patient dynamic, and to developing mutually beneficial and non-paternalistic partnerships with communities on behalf of individuals and defined populations” (p 123). We believe non-paternalistic partnerships are vital in creating pathways for reconciliation with Indigenous peoples as individuals become reflexive and mindful of the spaces they occupy.

Critical self-reflection is linked to “unsettling the settler within” as Regan (2010) describes in a journey of becoming aware of how we each participate in colonizing agendas. Recognizing and challenging power imbalances for respectful partnerships takes time and requires much more inclusion than we can cover in this article. However, shifting power imbalances toward inclusion of Indigenous peoples calls for courage and bravery. Absolon (2016) has presented a model to consider in creating wholistic and ethical inclusion with Indigenous peoples toward reconciliation. We encourage the reader to consider this article for further food for thought. Institutions, particularly educational institutions need to model the principles of reconciliation and humility at all levels. The TRC Calls to Action have amply called education institutions to action and it is time for the inclusion of the Indigenous peoples across the board in education departments and institutions.

Approaching reconciliation from a place of humility seeks to bring people together with a modest presence and open mind. We too believe and reiterate, “those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly” (Freire, 2008, p. 60). This presence and reflection calls for deeper understandings and compassion of the impacts of colonial violence with a willingness to listen and learn. Cultural humility calls for action in acknowledging power imbalances and structural inequities, much like the TRC Calls to Action. We would specifically call to a redistribution of resources of place, space and land. We would like to see churches share their kitchens, halls, facilities and acres of land with Indigenous groups who are starving for spaces and places to restore community building, ceremony and land based teachings. More specifically, Indigenous educational programs require land and spaces to create land based educational experiences for students and community. We call on churches to invite Indigenous groups and programs as an action to redistribute resources, spaces and places. Acknowledging your own limitations in knowledge, experiences, social location and what you don’t know are examples of practicing with humility. After all, we don’t know what we don’t know. We don’t know what we don’t know and we only realize this when we learn something we didn’t know. The irony of this is that humility is the only pathway to knowing that we don’t know what we don’t know. Let’s create space for one to become both teacher and learner along the pathway to reconciliation.

Our Closing Thoughts

It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be praxis. (Freire, 2008, p. 65).

Kathy

Being an Indigenous mother is a journey of reflection, action and more reflection. We try, we make mistakes and we try again. It's taking my lifetime to reclaim my true self. I know life is a ceremony, just like I believe *praxis* is a way of life. Co-authoring this article with Akiesha has caused me to reflect on my own journey as I continually work through the impacts of the legacies from the Indian Residential School within myself. From my position, I have invested my spirit, heart, mind and body in healing and recovering my true self as a woman, daughter, sister, mother and now grandmother. We have talked, shared and laughed in the writing of this article. Isn't this healing and learning reconciliation within our relationship? This is a monumental and profoundly moving act of reconciliation within family. Authoring with my *daanis* (daughter) is as profound as being in a healing circle with my mother. I did not have these opportunities with my grandmother, but having the ability to converse, share and learn from my mother and *daanis* is an act of reconciliation. Today, I am gathering stories of resistance and resilience from my mother in the ten years she was at the Indian residential school. Her stories are full of spirited young children who resisted their oppressors' wrath. They are wonderful stories revealing strength, courage and determination of resistance to colonization. These stories will soon be shared to lift us up as resilient peoples.

Cultural genocide is real and our family is still in recovery. We are amidst a process of reconciliation at many levels. I also use terms such as reclaiming, recovering, and remembering to characterize the act of coming back together into our wholeness. We are all trying to pull together the pieces of our identities, lands, languages and cultural heritage that were attacked. This journey has not been easy, but it is worthwhile. As a mother I have witnessed my daughter's passion, anger and hurt as we have reeled from the impacts of this cultural genocide. This was not a part of our Creator's plan, but the colonizers ravenousness appetite for the land and atrociousness to which our people were assaulted is inhumane. I understand the roots of complacency and ignorance and the role it plays in by-standers apathy. My plea is that we can have an impact in nudging and waking up our allies so we can have partners who want to engage in authentic pathways for reconciliation so my children and their children can be Indigenous and proud. I am grateful and want to acknowledge Akiesha's sharp mind and youthful engagement as we ventured on our pathway of sharing and learning from one another. We had fun working together. To me, healing and learning is

in doing and experiencing ourselves without fear of punishment. Writing this article has been an act of reconciliation for us. Reconciliation is in action not in sentiment.

Akiesha

It is a true honor to have humbly accepted the invitation to co-author this written piece with my mother. In writing this article as survivors of the legacy of the Indian Residential School system, as Indigenous women, as social work practitioners, as helpers, and as mother and daughter, we have demonstrated one of many pathways to reconciliation and restoration within family and relation. Through collective strength, determination, connection, humility, bravery, truth, honesty, wisdom and love, we have dismantled and surpassed the original intentions of the Indian Residential School system as a family. This is a good feeling that fills my heart and strengthens my spirit. Today, my *kokomish* (grandmother) sits with her tea in hand and shares her stories of resilience, strength, survival and determination while at St. John's Anglican Indian Residential School with our family. Although reconciliation and healing begins from within the self and our center fire, it is a trying and long journey that we cannot take alone nor should we have to. We are beings that require connection for survival and nurturance. This is a theme emphasized throughout this paper that is critical in understanding and beginning reconciliation and healing in a humble and truthful way. In co-authoring a written piece on reconciliation with my mother, I have engaged in a pathway to reconciliation in a new way individually, in relation, and in Creation. This pathway to reconciliation has evoked understanding and healing in ways that I had possibly not considered in the past. This is evidence to me that supports the notion that reconciliation, healing and positive growth are ongoing and connection, togetherness, and relation are vital and at the heart of this pathway.

Closing Words

We lifted up the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission because it is the work that told our mothers and grandmothers stories. These truths are not easy to live, nor are they easy to share. We tell them knowing that my mother resisted her place of subordination and oppression while in the residential schools. We know children and parents resisted. We also know there were matrons and staff in the schools who were kind and compassionate with our family members. The children remember these allies with fondness. There is so much to share with little space and time to do it in. It took the TRC five years to gather, sort out, present and report their findings. We covered a bit of our story, history and the insightful thoughts on reconciliation guided by the principles of the seven sacred teachings of humility, bravery, love, truth, honesty, respect, and wisdom. Reconciliation is about collective commitments to take action, one step at a time, from wherever you are at. For example, we want resources to be shared, we want land to enact our ceremonies and teachings on and we want mutual respect for our way of life. We

continue to encourage readers to read further to educate yourself and take your place with humility and courage to create shifts for the betterment of Indigenous peoples and society as a whole. We offered our thoughts on reconciliation and humility with the hope of providing guidance as we all move forward in exploring pathways of reconciliation.

References

- Absolon, K. (2016). Wholistic and Ethical: Social Inclusion with Indigenous peoples. *Journal of Social Inclusion*, 4. (1), 44-56.
- Banyard, V. L. (2015). The Promise of a Bystander Approach to Violence Prevention. Toward the Next Generation of Bystander Prevention of Sexual and Relationship Violence. Retrieved 15.03.16 from: *SpringerBriefs in Criminology*, p. 7-23. http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-23171-6_2
- Benton-Banai, E. (1988). *The Mishomis book*. Hayward, WI: Indian Country Communications Inc.
- Freire, P. (2008). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th Anniversary ed.). New York: Continuum.
- Gray, M., Coates, J., Yellow Bird, M., & Hetherington, T. (2013). *Decolonizing Social Work*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Linklater, R. (2014). *Decolonizing trauma work. Indigenous stories and strategies*. Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing.
- Monchalin, L. (2016). *The Colonial Problem. An Indigenous Perspective on Crime and Injustice in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Regan, P. (2010). *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada*. Vancouver, B.C.: UBC Press
- Simpson, Leanne. (2011). *Dancing on Our Turtle's back. Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-creation, Resurgence and A New Emergence*. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing.
- Truth & Reconciliation Commission. (2015). What we have learned: Principles of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission. Ottawa: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Downloaded 15.03.16 from www.trc.ca
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Website: TRC. Retrieved 15.03.16 from: <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=3> August 30, 2015.
- Wa Thiong'o, N. (1986). *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. Oxford, England: James Currey / Heinemann.