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High School Teachers Working Towards Reconciliation

Examining the Teaching and Learning of Residential Schools

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Research Context

Canada has a long and well-documented history of unequal relations with the first peoples of this land. From policies of forced starvation (Daschuk, 2013), to the ongoing murders and disappearances of Indigenous girls and women in Canada, Indigenous peoples continue to be marginalized, oppressed, and rendered invisible in national narratives. Yet many Canadians remain ignorant about Canada's history of colonialism and its ongoing effects. This reality creates significant challenges with respect to our abilities as a nation to work toward reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and settler Canadians. It is thus important to be attentive to and understand the many very real ways that Indigenous peoples have been, and continue to be, deeply harmed by historical colonial policies/practices in this country, including the Indian residential school (IRS) system, and the ways in which settler Canadians are both implicated in and how they may work against these practices. With this in mind, our research was an attempt to respond to the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* specific to educating Canadians about the history and legacies of residential schools in Canada. Grounded in anti-colonial theory and using action research and critical discourse analysis as orienting methodologies, this qualitative research involved seven teacher-researchers from Regina Public Schools, one Faculty of Education participant from the University of Regina and numerous high school students from across Regina public schools.

As an action research project and in light of the Calls to Action, we approached this project as "a form of self-reflective inquiry by (teacher-researcher) participants ... in order to improve understanding of their practices in context with a view to maximizing social justice" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p.227). The research explored how teachers took up and taught about processes of colonialism in Canada, including the IRS system, how secondary students made sense of themselves as Canadians as they learned about colonialism, the history and legacy of residential schools, the challenges and successes of classroom teachers in teaching about colonialism and residential schools, and how classrooms can become sites for reconciliation. An overall goal of the collaborative action research project was to deeply consider the practice of truth and reconciliation education.

Community Profile

This research project is situated in Treaty 4 territory, in southern Saskatchewan. It is the territory of the Cree, Saulteaux, Nakoda, Dakota, and Lakota peoples, and the homeland of the Métis. Five public high schools in a large urban centre became the research sites for this project which took place over a school year. Seven teachers teaching a variety of grades and courses, including Social Studies, Native Studies, History, English Language Arts, and Mathematics participated in the research with willing student participants. Students were a heterogeneous group with respect to racialization, socio-economic class, gender, languages spoken, religions practiced, etc. All of the teachers identified as white settler, and all but one of the teachers were female. We also had the privilege and benefit of Indigenous Life Speaker Noel Starblanket, who provided important support, advice, and guidance to us as we began our collective journey toward reconciliation through this work. Our knowledge, understanding, and commitment were strengthened because of his involvement in the project.

Relevance of this Research

Perry Bellegarde (2015), Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, has stated publicly “Colonialism didn’t just impact Aboriginal people, it forever changed the way the European population on the prairies would see Aboriginals as a problem, never a partner.” This perception is not unique to the prairies; rather, it stretches from east to west coast, from north to south. Yet so many Canadians remain ignorant about Canada’s history of colonialism, making it all the more challenging to work toward reconciliation with Indigenous peoples (Tupper, 2014). In Canada, dominant historical narratives have been critiqued for their failures to make visible the importance of Indigenous peoples to the foundation of the country (Miller, 2009; Mitchell, 2013; Saul, 2009). School curriculum has been implicated in perpetuating contemporary forms of colonialism in Canada; it is a colonial space (St. Denis, 2011; Tupper & Cappello, 2008). At the most simplistic level, curriculum documents privilege certain content over others: some material is included and other material is left out. Necessarily, curricula are limited and therefore give preferential treatment to some visions/content/stories over others (Dion, 2009; Donald, 2009; Loewen, 2007; Pinar, 2004; Tupper & Cappello, 2008). At a more complex level, curriculum represents the collective story students are told about “our past, our present and our future” (Grumet, 1981, p. 115). Gaps, omissions, and exclusions in curriculum and pedagogy are all aspects of ‘unknowing’ and ignorance that contribute to constructed ‘truths’ about what it means to be Canadian, as well as what it means to be an Indigenous person in Canada (Dion, 2009).

In the context of social sciences, English Language Arts, and Mathematics, there has been a relative absence of content and objectives specific to teaching residential schools and indeed, dominant narratives of the nation that exclude considerations of our colonial history abound (Mitchell, 2013; Smith, 2014; Tupper, 2014). This leaves students with incomplete and inaccurate historical understanding of the history of the country. In light of this, and in light of the work of the TRC to gather stories of residential school survivors across the country, several of the Calls to Action that were released by the TRC in June 2015 focus on education. More specifically, provincial governments are urged to create curriculum on residential schools because the education of Canadians in this respect is seen as essential to reconciliation.

This research is thus timely and urgent given the Calls to Action, the release, on December 15, 2015, of the final TRC report and the work that has been happening in Saskatchewan through treaty education to engage students in learning about and more deeply understanding the history and effects of residential schools specifically and colonialism more broadly. It is also timely given the very limited body of research focused on teaching residential schools (Tupper, 2014), the ongoing deficit discourses that circulate regarding Indigenous peoples in Canada and the very real racisms that Indigenous peoples frequently experience.

Research Questions

Throughout the research project we aimed to keep the following questions central to our inquiry:

- How are teachers taking up and teaching about residential schools, especially in light of the Calls to Action?
- How do senior secondary students make sense of themselves as Canadians as they learn the history and legacies of residential schools?
- What are the challenges and successes classroom teachers encounter in teaching about residential schools?
- What do reconciliation efforts look like in a classroom?

However as with any action research, other questions emerged through the research process and in collaboration with teacher researchers. These helped to further focus the study:

- What sorts of resistances by students were encountered over the course of the research project?
- How were these resistances navigated by teachers and other students in the classroom?
- What were the gaps in our own knowledge of colonialism?
- What were our theoretical, pedagogical, and personal learnings through this project?

Data Gathering

In the context of both our research meetings and the in-class research, teachers journaled about their evolving understandings and experiences teaching the history and continuing colonial legacy of residential schools. Throughout the project, teachers critically reflected (personally and collectively in collaborative sessions) on their own knowledge and pedagogy in relation to residential schools as part of the ongoing colonial project in Canada. Teacher reflections were considered through critical discourse analysis. We recognized that teachers were being asked to invite their students into difficult conversations which may create tension and resistance in the classroom. Ongoing support and mentoring were included as part of the teacher-researcher collaborative sessions often involving Life Speaker Noel Starblanket. Teacher participants were reminded that at any point during the research project they could withdraw with no negative effect but all remained committed to the project through to its completion.

Participating students worked within their classroom contexts to learn about residential school experiences in Canada. Through a variety of content and learning activities, students were encouraged to develop deeper understandings of the history of residential schools as well as the ongoing realities of this federal policy including missing and murdered Indigenous women, the disproportionate number of Indigenous children in government care, in prison populations, rates of poverty amongst Indigenous peoples, the inequitable rates of educational success, mental illness and suicide, and discrimination and racism in Canada. Throughout these learning opportunities, students reflected (in course work, during classroom discussions, and in focus group conversations) on their understandings and the ways in which these nuanced appreciations enabled them to (re)consider their own identities as Canadians. Students' classroom work and reflections and the insights they offered during focus group discussions were considered through a critical discourse/ anti-colonial lens.

Throughout the research we maintained a commitment to the following outcomes:

- Students will have gained a deeper understanding of residential schools and the ongoing legacies of this shared history and be able to (re)consider their own identities as Canadians alongside this history.
- Materials will be developed to share with other classroom teachers.
- Teachers will have critically reflected on their own knowledge and pedagogy in relation to residential schools as part of the ongoing colonial project in Canada.

Research Activities

As an action research project and in light of the Calls to Action, this project became “a form of self-reflective inquiry by (teacher-researcher) participants ... in order to improve understanding of their practices in context with a view to maximizing social justice” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p.227). Through a cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, the seven teacher-researchers and one university teacher-educator worked towards establishing “self-critical communities of people participating and collaborating” (Cohen et al, 2000, p. 229) in ways to contribute to social change and reconciliation through education.

During this action research project, teacher-researchers met and engaged in activities as a community of practice. Research questions were considered through the examination of anti-colonial readings and discussions (focused on colonization, treaties, reconciliation, colonial discourses, nationalist narratives, and whiteness) as the teacher researchers planned for and reflected on the students’ learning experiences. Teaching materials included (but were not limited to) the TRC summary report, Legacy of Hope Foundation resources, primary source documents, and such texts as *Children of the Broken Treaty* (Angus, 2015) and *Secret Path* (2016). Pre-planning for teaching colonialism, including the history and legacies of the IRS system, involved examining readings and research related to reconciliation education; establishing common understandings of the research project; and developing initial classroom activities. Further, participants met with Gary Edwards of All Nations Hope Network prior to the in-class portion of the project and we were guided in our pre-planning by Life Speaker Noel Starblanket.

Our research group came together on November 1, 2016, for the initial research meeting following a broad invitation to high school teachers in the division to participate in the project. This half day together was an opportunity to clarify the goals of the research, to begin building relationships with one another, to establish timelines, and to articulate the various reasons that brought each of us to this research space. We also took time to talk about an anti-colonial reading we had done in advance of our meeting (Donald’s (2009a) *Forts, Curriculum, and Indigenous Métissage: Imagining Decolonization of Aboriginal-Canadian Relations in Educational Contexts*), and to distribute books that had been ordered for participants to enhance their knowledge and understanding of the IRS system in Canada (Haig-Brown’s (1988) *Resistance and Renewal: Surviving the Indian Residential School*, Metcalfe-Chenail’s (2016) *In this together: Fifteen stories of Truth and Reconciliation*, and Vowel’s (2016) *Indigenous Writes: A guide to First Nation, Métis, and Inuit issues in Canada*).

On December 2, 2016, we gathered together for a full day with the intent to learn more about the history and legacies of residential schools and the ongoing effects of colonialism in Canada. We began by making tobacco ties which were then presented to each teacher and to Life Speaker Noel Starblanket as an invitation to participate in the research journey in a good way. Next, Life Speaker Noel Starblanket led us in a smudge situated in the school courtyard where a teepee stood for ceremonial use. Following the smudge, we travelled to the site of the former Regina Indian Industrial School where we spent time at the cemetery on Pinkie Road. Many children who died while attending the residential school were buried in this plot of land with no markers to indicate where they lay, save for the crosses to mark the graves of the children of one of the school principals. This is a significant site made more significant for our research team because of the teachings that Noel offered us here, and the prayers we all offered, along with tobacco, for the children. We spent the remainder of the day talking about our experiences that morning, and these conversations were audiotaped and transcribed as part of our data collection.

We came together again on December 19, 2016, for a full day. We began at All Nations Hope Network where Resolution Support Worker Gary Edwards spoke with us about his work and a book project *Signs of Your Identity* he was involved in with photojournalist Daniella Zalcmán. This stunning collection of images of residential school survivors, all of whom live in Regina's North Central community, offered the research team further learning and opportunity to reflect on the very real effects of residential schools for the survivors and their family members. Gary too shared his experiences of residential school, inviting us to take up Daniella's book in our respective teaching contexts. Next, we visited the RCMP Heritage Centre for a different kind of experience, as we toured the museum exhibits, noting the ways in which settler narratives and Canadian nationalism were offered up in mostly uncritical ways. The day culminated at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum where we interacted with the First Nations exhibit and learned more about the upcoming Treaty 4 exhibit, whose intent was to offer a different, more fulsome engagement with the past.

On January 12, 2016, the research group spent a half day planning for the winter semester during which the teaching of residential schools and Canadian colonialism would take place. Ideas and resources were shared, and a broad discussion of our experiences to date was audiotaped and later transcribed as part of our data collection. We discussed the importance of journaling throughout the teaching, and re-visited the research questions as a means to focus and guide our action research process. At this time, we also co-created focus group questions that we would invite participating students to respond to and confirmed when and in what contexts the teaching would take place. We agreed that we would come together again in May to discuss our progress, and that release time in June would be important for data analysis, especially establishing common themes that emerged through the various forms of data.

Data Generation and Analysis

Reflecting critical action research practices (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Somekh & Lewin, 2005), data was generated in various ways. As previously outlined, teacher-researchers reflected on their own understandings, practices, and classroom experiences in a journal. Conversations within the teacher-researchers community of practice were recorded digitally. Participating students' understanding and reflections were gathered through their coursework. They also participated in focus group conversations with a member of the research team which was digitally recorded and transcribed.

The data analysis was a collective endeavour, involving critical discourse analysis. As Luke (1996) outlines, critical discourse analysis involves the examination of texts and discourses within their social contexts to discern how they are used to ensure "power and identity are legitimized, negotiated and contested toward political ends" (p. 12). In an attempt to disrupt the "apparently natural flow of talk and text in institutional life" (Luke, 1996, p. 12) critical discourse analysis aims to "destabilize 'authoritative discourses' and ... relations of inequality, domination, and subordination" (Luke, 1996, p. 12).

Emerging Themes

The research activities with the teacher-researchers, their work within their respective classrooms with participating students, and their self-reflexive journaling generated extensive amounts of data. Throughout the critical analysis of this data, several themes began to emerge. Perhaps as interesting as these themes are independent of one another, the ways in which they exist in tension provide insightful opportunities for more nuanced understandings to be constructed. The following presentation of themes aims to illustrate emerging commonalities and demonstrate the ways in which realizations run counter to one another.

Themes Existing in Tension with one Another

Demonstrating Resistance vs. Raising Critical Consciousness

In considering Canada's colonial history and commonsense narratives of Canada as a 'good' nation, it is likely not a surprise that resistance was encountered throughout this research inquiry. This resistance came in a variety of active and passive forms. Active forms of resistance seemed to focus around some recurrent discourses. First and the most prominent discourse of students in several of the research sites was *I know this already* or

the acknowledgment of a pre-existing awareness of Indian residential schools in Canada but the need now to *move on* from this history. Several of the teacher-researchers shared their experiences in which students claimed to have learned about residential schools already and thus felt bored with the content or like they were being *beaten over the head* with this information. As teacher-researcher Sarah shared, “many students still felt they had been taught this many times before.” We came to refer to this phenomenon as ‘residential school fatigue’ wherein students seemed to demonstrate less empathy or compassion for residential school students who suffered at the hands of historical genocidal policies due to their perceived increased exposure to these topics. In focus group discussions, some students shared that they would have preferred to explore the historical challenges experienced by non-Indigenous Canadians, or focused more on experiences of Indigenous peoples in countries other than Canada.

Given the prominence of this discourse, we spent considerable time as a research group discussing both its validity and its power as a (re)structuring force of whiteness. First, we considered some of the ways in which students may be exposed to the same resources, activities, and discussions semester after semester in multiple subject areas. Following this discussion, we explored effective ways to negotiate these realities. While it may be tempting to develop scope and sequence guides for various subject areas in order to alleviate this perceived overlapping, we reflected on what we had come to understand through this research project as well as other teaching experiences about effective pedagogical practices (Sinnema & Aitken, 2012). Through our shared teaching and research experiences, several pedagogical practices seemed to be effective in our effort to decrease redundancy, to increase anti-oppressive understandings, and raise students’ (and our own) critical consciousness. In particular, focusing on the creation of meaningful and authentic learning experiences which often included extending learning beyond the traditional classroom space to develop personal connections to people and places, facilitating student-led inquiry, utilizing diverse multiple approaches to the content, contextualizing colonial events and policies beyond residential schools experiences as isolated events, and moving past the assignment of guilt to a consideration of present-day responsibility seemed to increase effectiveness and critical engagement in these research classrooms.

In addition to considering the validity of the *I know this already* claims, we took into account the ways in which this discourse might be used as a (re)structuring force of whiteness in the classroom. As Mitchell (2013) outlines, “structuring forces of whiteness are understood to be part of the extraordinarily effective organizing principle or ideology of whiteness that has very real political, legal, economic, social, and educational benefits for those racialized white (and conversely, drawbacks for those racialized non-white)” (p.9). By claiming to be already familiar with the Indian residential school policy and its intergenerational impacts on Indigenous peoples, students may have been attempting to avoid authentically considering this difficult knowledge (Britzman, 1998, p.2). As teacher-researchers, we came to be increasingly aware of the ways in which this discourse was repeatedly used in an attempt to derail activities or discussions about residential school experiences as it became increasingly evident that the students did not *know this already*. Furthermore, given the number of students who empathetically identified the need for more and varied education around this topic (and other colonial policies) following research activities, it certainly seemed as though the original claim of *knowing this information already* was at least in some instances a falsehood. One of the student participants Ainsley shared this sentiment

as she explained, “we need to have much more education than we do even now ... like you hear about residential schools in elementary school but like you don’t learn about all that happened. But like ... how they’re (Indigenous peoples) set up to fail and all those things. So I think that people need to be way more educated.” As a research group, we grew to more fully appreciate the need to utilize effective pedagogical practices to disrupt these (re)structuring forces. In particular, the need to create meaningful, authentic connections to this knowledge was reiterated. Often these meaningful connections to colonial topics and issues included encouraging personal, emotional connections to people, places, or other primary sources.

Closely related to the *I have learned this already* discourse was the recurring idea that as Canadians we should just *move on already*. While the end result of this *can’t we just move on already* discourse may be similar in effect to the more often cited discourse that Indigenous peoples need to *get over it* (with the *it* referring to oppressive colonial policies and experiences perceived to be in the past) (Reagan, 2010), it seemed somewhat different. Rather than placing the onus on Indigenous peoples to forgive or at least forget historical (and contemporary) injustices and oppressions, this *move on already* discourse insinuated a certain level of ownership or responsibility for these injustices was being placed on non-Indigenous, presumably white settler peoples. While this shift of responsibility to non-Indigenous peoples may be viewed as somewhat constructive, it also presents different considerations. Perhaps these *can’t we just move on* statements mask feelings of guilt for the many historical and contemporary injustices faced by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples in Canada. One student identifies these feelings of shame as she notes, “this stuff made me angry because it is all we learned about. I know nothing about my cultures just that white people are horrible people. I am also scared that my child will have to grow up and learn about this and we will never know our culture. We just know that we are terrible people.”

These feelings of guilt or blame at least indicate that students acknowledge injustices have occurred throughout the colonization of what is now Canada. These acknowledgments (explicit or implicit) also help to contextualize other discourses used by students presumably in an attempt to (re)structure whiteness and minimize the effects of colonialism. Blame for past injustices was often directed at government or in the case of residential school abuses, the church. As Presley illustrates, “we chose to not acknowledge the unfair things the Canadian government did in the past.” She goes on to explain that “... I learned a lot about how our society today is set up for mostly the white people to succeed and ... how all the things the Canadian government did in the past, like residential schools, the *Indian Act* and how that has set up white differently than Indigenous people.”

Additionally while students acknowledged historical injustices, some were quick to argue that we are not like that anymore and Canada is better today. Rebecca argues, “the sad truth is that we are going to have to spend years regaining the relationship with Aboriginal people because of how history treated them.” Similarly Ainsley shares, “Canada’s history shows lots of thoughts of superiority, ignorance, and lack of acceptance ... we pretty much went against all of the things we claim we are as a country. I feel like we have claimed these things to cover up our past and focus mainly on what Canada is today.” She went on to share that, “Canada is a lot more accepting and polite so they (nationalist claims of tolerance and acceptance) aren’t as inaccurate in the present day.”

While student acknowledgments of injustices and oppressions are encouraging, it became obvious that these other discursive practices served to mitigate the influence of these acknowledgments. The assertions that blame lay only with the government and that we are better than we used to be (re)structures both whiteness and colonialism. In light of these realizations emerging through the data, the teacher-researchers discussed ways we had either effectively disrupted whiteness and colonialism or intended to do so in the future. Critical to these discussions was the acknowledgment that as teachers, we need to be aware of our students' readiness to unlearn nationalist myths and to relearn truths that are more reflective of non-dominant non-white narratives. Knowing who our students are and what they have been previously exposed to will enable us to more thoughtfully create learning opportunities with the aim to disrupt dominant discourses and nationalist narratives but not prematurely slam the door of opportunity for more critical learning experiences.

We also discussed the importance of teaching explicitly for disruption and an unlearning of nationalist versions of our history. For most of the teachers involved in this study, this critical work necessarily required a more thorough and contextualized look at colonization, past and present, in Canada. In fact, several of the teachers approached the examination of the Indian Residential schools policy and its impacts as merely one policy within a greater framework aimed at destroying Indigenous peoples, cultures, and societies. As part of the larger picture, students seemed at times to be less resistant to the realities faced by survivors and ongoing systemic injustices. As one student, Ava notes, the "legacy of institutional racism and discrimination of the past (like the *Indian Act*, Indian agent, pass system) continues to affect Aboriginal peoples in Canada and has contributed to the systematic racism they face today." Another student, Rory, also seemed to recognize the purposeful oppressive agenda of colonizers when he noted that, "the Government of Canada began the deliberate destruction of the culture (sic) of Aboriginal peoples."

Finally it is imperative that as teachers, we support students in nuanced ways as they encounter difficult knowledge and as they unlearn and relearn the histories of Canada. While providing support for students who are struggling with their sense of national identity but also their own individual identities, teachers need to be aware of the supports that exist within their schools and their division. In addition to these supports, teachers involved in this research project identified the need to shift discussions past the assignment of guilt and onto a consideration of present-day responsibility. Sarah iterates how she has come to understand these emotions and how they relate to one another in this critical work. She argues,

guilt is a feeling that ... you get from something you've done wrong. Responsibility is something that you feel for something that you know needs to change. So I feel like the next time I teach this I think I would ... fram(e) it just with ... I want you to think about ... what you're responsible for in learning this content and how you can act on it; because I find that there's just so much guilt.

Teachers discussed the ways in which they turned to the 94 Calls to Action from the TRC as a way to engage students with present-day responsibilities that can be endorsed rather than remaining caught in the guilt of historical realities.

Finally a *why are we doing this?* discourse was present in some of the classrooms involved in this study. It is reassuring to note that this discourse was noticeably absent in most of the social science classes (History, Native Studies, and Social Studies) within this research project which is a shift from past experiences for many of teachers in this study. Historically, students have questioned the legitimacy of including topics deemed to be Indigenous issues in classes that are not Native Studies (Mitchell, 2013). Perhaps the less frequent use of this limited, whitening categorization of these colonial issues indicates some progress being made in that a number of students are now willing to recognize how issues affecting Indigenous peoples are not merely Indigenous issues but are rather Canadian issues.

It is important to note that this discourse was still prevalent in the English Language Arts and the Mathematics classes. One English student claimed, "I feel like I'm in a Native Studies class." After repeated challenges like this one, the teacher began to second guess her inclusion of these topics. Sarah wrote, "while I felt I was using appropriate materials (short stories, magazine articles, curriculum writing outcomes) to discuss this content (teaching of residential schools and Indigenous oppression), students still felt it was too closely related to a History or Native Studies class ... I'm not sure how to work around this ... discomfort with this material has caused me to question teaching it in ELA." Similar resistance to critical topics was expressed by students in the participating Mathematics class. Comments like "why are we doing this in a math class?", "this isn't math," "why social in math" and "let's just do real math" characterized this resistance and the work ahead of us to establish legitimacy for these topics across subject areas.

In addition to these active forms of resistance, various forms of passive resistance were more subtly articulated within our classrooms. Often passive resistance was demonstrated through typical disengaged behaviours like a lack of authentic participation in classroom discussions and activities or written responses wherein students would engage in *telling us what we want to hear* behaviours. Taye shared her experience as she transitioned from a simulation wherein students enthusiastically played the roles of townspeople who were fighting for the survival of their way of life and culture to a historical examination of the colonization of Canada.

It is as if I flipped a switch. As soon as we made the connections between their roles in the simulation and Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island resisting and enduring the systematic colonization of Europeans ... the classroom climate changed. Some students who were actively engaged, even charged up during the simulation, deflated almost instantly.

Sarah concurred, "I can tell when a student's responses are not meaningful and when they are just answering a question to answer it."

While many (if not all of these) resistances were often present in each of the research sites, they were juxtaposed with multiple examples of raised critical consciousness as students progressed throughout classroom experiences. These examples of more critical consciousness were pulled from multiple participating students across the research classrooms. To begin, students were able to identify Eurocentric worldviews and racist principles as they examined historical and ongoing relations between Indigenous and

non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. For example, Rory notes, “the Eurocentric attitudes, ignorance and disrespect displayed by the government” towards Indigenous peoples. Presley also demonstrated her awareness of the diverse ways in which peoples were treated by British colonizers. She explains, “the Indigenous peoples were often ignored, almost as if they weren’t recognized as people ... however, the British always recognized that the French had rights ... the French were European and seen as human but the Indigenous were thought to be ‘savages.’” Keegan acknowledges how for many, these discriminatory attitudes have not changed. He argues,

I’ve come to realize ... that how the RIIS cemetery compares to the Regina Cemetery is a direct comparison of how Canada treats its Indigenous people now. How we put their problems away so we can forget the atrocious ways we treated them on first contact, and how we separate and believe we are superior and that we didn’t come from the same monkey a million years ago.

Rebecca also notes present day discriminatory attitudes as she explains, “I see stereotypes still guiding people’s views on Aboriginal people, I think that Canada still has a long way to go.”

Many students seemed to recognize the deliberate, concrete ways in which systemic inequities and institutionalized racism have been and continue to be built into the foundation of Canada which in many ways led (and continue to lead) to policies and practices that are nothing short of cultural genocide. For example, after calculating the percentage of land in Canada allotted to First Nations peoples as reserve land, one group of math students responded with dismay and exclaimed to their class, “that’s bullshit!” A tenth grade history student Presley, observed that Indigenous peoples in residential school learned mostly about religion, prayer, and skills for manual labour and that they,

didn’t learn things that (non-Indigenous students attending provincially funded public schools) would have learned. And they (Indigenous students) were set up for ... jobs that involved labour and not thinking ... so they weren’t set up to do well-paying jobs. So then they got into poverty and it creates that cycle ... that’s the poverty cycle.

One of her classmates Ainsley went on to lament,

... and it’s just a toxic circle of life for Indigenous peoples ... (they) aren’t really set up for success because there were so many things put in place and so many things that happened to them ... they just weren’t put in the best position to make the most out of their lives as like the white person would have been.

Ainsley noted the inequity that continues today and how it needs to be addressed if authentic reconciliation is to be a reality. She reflected,

to me, reconciliation means fixing and making sure things that happened in the past don't happen again, and for the things that did happen, there should be like an apology, and not just an apology but actions to actually fix what it has caused in the past and the present. It's not rebalancing the relationship between the First Nations people (sic) and the non-Indigenous people, but it's actually balancing it because it wasn't balanced in the first place.

Perhaps the most encouraging signs of heightened critical consciousness came as students were able to acknowledge and critically reflect on their own prior (mis)understandings, biases and discriminatory beliefs. Early in the semester, Presley acknowledged, "I learned that I silently judge in my head because of the stereotypes I've been exposed to, and that isn't okay." As the semester unfolded, she courageously reflected on how the pervasiveness of stereotypes and misunderstandings/lack of understanding lead to discrimination and racism. She explained that,

the most meaningful thing for me was learning about how Indigenous (peoples) aren't set up to succeed due to the things the government has done. It's important for us to realize that. It's made me realize how I have been taught in the past kind of influences the way I thought about that ... because my parents don't really know about any of the residential schools or in-depth of any, like the things that the government did ... not that they have taught me stereotypes, but they haven't taught me to not believe the stereotypes. So I think realizing that I'm set up to succeed and people aren't was pretty power (sic) for me.

Interestingly, the same students who claimed they had *already been taught* about the residential school policy and its effects were often also the ones who eventually called for the need for more education. As Ainsley exemplifies, "my final thoughts are that we just need a lot more education about all of these things because after what I've learned, I've become a lot more open-minded and understanding of what's going on." Presley iterates this need for education as well as she argues, "I just think that it's so important for everyone to be educated ... like for this to be talked about" These statements are far cries from the initial claims that *we have learned this already*.

Students also demonstrated how their newly constructed understandings were affecting how they viewed Canada. Ava, a Grade 12 student who is new to Canada, acknowledged how her sense of the nation has changed. She shares, "I thought Canada is a great and peaceful country. But it (learning about residential schools) has changed my view because (I) have never heard about Canada's past history which is terrible ... hearing the story, definitely my understanding of Canada changed." Another Grade 12 student noted how learning about the oppression Indigenous people have faced in Canada has changed her perspective of this country. Her teacher recalls Nicole "talked about how her eyes have been opened to the truth of Canada's past and how that past has affected that present ... she called on (her peers) to not be blinded to Canada's hurtful past." Another student seemed to recognize how increased levels of critical consciousness are affecting our national identity today. Rory explains that historical injustices are,

shaping us as a country now more than ever ... our secrets are starting to come out of the shadow. These terrible acts of cultural genocide are now beginning to stick to Canada, and it is affecting our reputation, and will continue to until all of the problems are dealt with properly.

Despite encountering resistances from students, it became increasingly clear over the duration of the research project that the critical consciousness of many students was fostered through their engagement with colonialism. A critical question then becomes, how are teachers taking up and teaching about residential schools (as well as other colonial policies and practices) in effective, meaningful ways as opposed to traditional practices that have left students believing they had *learned this already*.

Checking off Superficial Learning vs. Creating Meaningful, Authentic Learning Experiences

Colonial topics and ongoing issues affecting Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada are not new to the curriculum. In fact, in Saskatchewan treaty education has been mandatory since 2007 (Tupper, 2011). However, as the resistance to these topics continues to demonstrate, much work remains to be done in fostering critical consciousness in more students. If topics such as these are being taught, why aren't more students able to shift their historical consciousness – the ways in which they are able to think about themselves as Canadians in light of colonialism? What did the teacher-researchers in this project come to understand about effectively engaging students in learning to facilitate the development of critical understandings and consciousness that extend beyond checklists of superficial content covered?

One of the most omnipresent realizations made by the teacher-researchers throughout the project was the importance of personal connections and relationships. Time and time again, the teacher-researchers themselves as well as their students in the classrooms noted the importance of relationships with people and with place. These relationships seemed to have a powerful impact on students' abilities to connect emotionally to the topics of discussion. For example, teacher-researcher Christie noted the impact of inviting an Indigenous community member into her class and how it revitalized her commitment to anti-colonial teaching. "I felt my passion for this topic and work deteriorating; however, the moment [the Indigenous community member] started speaking to my class I was instantly reminded why it is so important to have Indigenous voices in our curriculum, classroom, and student's lives." Interestingly, one of Christie's student also commented on the value of the Indigenous Elder's visit to their classroom. Sean reflected,

[The elder's] accounts of residential school bring much more personal meaning to the travesties that were committed. Hearing [the elder] speak allows for people to get a great sense of what he has been through and his experiences through the way he spoke, presented himself, and the topics he was speaking of. He lets his emotions speak for him and this makes his message all the more powerful.

Teacher-researcher Sarah and one of her students noted the importance of Indigenous voices to reconciliation efforts. After listening to the Elder, Sarah commented, “listening to his stories has made me realize a major part of reconciliation is for victims to be heard – really, truly heard.” Her student Michelle shared, “I knew there were residential schools but I didn’t know how much of an effect there really was. Hearing other people’s views opened my eyes. I was always a ‘why can’t they just get over it’ person, after being educated on the subject I’m definitely a ‘why can’t we just always remember this’ person.”

Learning from Indigenous voices and experiences was significant for the students in our research. However, as teacher-researchers we discussed some of the cautions we had when we welcomed visitors into our classrooms. Ultimately, these concerns related to how we can best create safe environments for Indigenous voices in our spaces mindful of the potential for survivors to be re-victimized in the telling of their stories. Teachers expressed their desire to shield these survivors from forces of resistance they might encounter in the classroom. Often we feared the effects of students who presented as disinterested or worse, disrespectful. Discussions focused on how we support and at times, shield survivors from these reactions. We also wrestled with how we could create a safe environment for Indigenous survivors of colonial trauma when we were essentially asking them to share harrowing life experiences. In particular at one of the participating schools, an intergenerational survivor worked with teaching staff on a reconciliation project that included sharing her family’s stories of their experiences at various residential schools, displacement due to the ‘60s scoop, and loss of Indigenous women’s lives. While the project was a tremendous learning experience for many students and teachers, it was an incredibly challenging and emotional one for the Indigenous survivor. This concern reflects our need to be mindful that it is not the role and responsibility of an oppressed person to educate oppressors. Indigenous peoples may experience additional trauma as they undertake a teaching role to educate non-Indigenous peoples about their trauma (Blague, 2015; Reagan, 2010). These ongoing discussions reflected our desire to create supportive, healing, ethical relations as we worked to privilege Indigenous voices in our learning environments. They also reflect our ongoing struggles as white settler teachers wanting to teach in good ways. We found ourselves turning to the wisdom and guidance of Life Speaker Noel Starblanket in these instances who encouraged us to listen to and respect the needs of the Indigenous people who we invited to our classrooms.

In addition to establishing connections and building relationships with Indigenous peoples, several students noted the importance of connecting in different ways to the communities in which they live. Following an excursion to the site of the RIIS and the nearby unmarked graves of Indigenous children who died at the school, Jamie noted, “when we got to the RIIS cemetery, it brought back times when my family and I drove past the white fence and I didn’t have a clue what it was.” Teacher-researcher Christie reflected on the significance of her visit to the RIIS site as she explained, “being at the cemetery makes me realize how much I need to get out of the classroom with my students and let them experience those same experiences.” Fellow teacher-researcher Rachel also articulated the potential impact of moving beyond in-class academic activities to incorporate experiences within the community.

... I absolutely agree that moving away from the purely academic study and into the real-world experience is incredibly invaluable.

Especially, I literally have lived in Regina my entire life and I never knew that cemetery was there. That in and of itself is massively problematic for me, because it just speaks to how we continue to try to bury our history instead of actually acknowledging it, and trying to learn from it so that we can do better. So I want to be able to give these experiences to my students on a regular basis so that it can become real for them as well, and so that they can't try to distance themselves or disassociate from the experience and the information.

For a project in Haley's classroom, students learned about the origin of place names. Keegan exclaimed, "I've lived on Aberdeen Street for a long time and had no idea who Aberdeen was!" In addition to becoming more critically aware of their communities, students were also challenged to consider the meaning behind and the power infused through these place names and monuments. Jamie demonstrated her heightened critical consciousness as she describes her realizations,

I didn't know that the majority of the statues and streets are all non-Indigenous people but mostly European who were not all good and had horrible histories. There was only two statues that I saw that were related to Indigenous people. They were Chief Payepot and the buffalo. This is because we are all still in a colonized mindset.

From these and many other comments made by both teachers and students, it is clear how valuable personal connections and relationships can be to foster meaningful learning experiences and authentic commitments to work towards reconciliation. Donald (2009a) speaks directly to the importance of connectivity as he writes,

(i)t is an ethical imperative to recognize the significance of the relationships we have with others, how our histories and experiences are layered and position us in relation to each other, and how our futures as people similarly are tied together. It is also an ethical imperative to see that, despite our varied place-based cultures and knowledge systems, we live in the world together with others and must constantly think and act with reference to these relationships. Any knowledge we gain about the world interweaves us more deeply with these relationships and gives us life (p. 7).

Students and teacher-researchers also identified the need to connect with critical allies for support. As a research group, we often spoke of the value of working together as critical allies to celebrate successes and to offer support through difficult and challenging situations. In particular, we acknowledged the importance of our professional community as a sounding board, for moral support, and as a pool of shared resources. When we shared our research project with other colleagues on a professional learning day, one teacher reflected on the support network we had developed stating, "it was refreshing to hear colleagues who are passionate about this work, talk about their struggles and experiences." One of the teacher researchers, Jameson, detailed a particular experience

with a student who came to him for support after witnessing a racist act outside of class. This would seem to indicate at least in this instance that the student identified Jameson as an ally and looked to him for support. Reflecting on crucial elements that fostered effective and meaningful learning experiences, it was clear how important personal relationships were for students and for teachers in sustaining our commitment to engage in this difficult work.

As previously noted, we also came to appreciate the importance of utilizing effective pedagogical practices when dealing with difficult topics. Defaulting to traditional transmissive approaches to teaching and learning is not sufficient to engage students meaningfully in learning difficult histories and exploring counter-narratives to the dominant story of Canada. Sarah reflects, "I have learned that having students be in control of assignments and learning this knowledge as an inquiry project is more powerful than simply providing them with information – this is important to remember. It allows them to learn about what they want to and how they want to." Taye also spoke of the ways in which she provided differentiated learning activities for students to deal with diverse prior understandings and to refute claims of redundancy. Students who self-identified as needing foundational work around the topic of residential school policy and its effects were given more directed learning materials whereas those who felt they were adequately aware of the basic details of the policy and its intergenerational effects were challenged to inquire into more specific, focused areas. These students chose individualized topics such as an examination of residential schools in our area, the health practices and their resulting impacts within the schools, and the ways in which Indigenous children and their families resisted genocidal policies both within and from outside of these schools.

In addition, teacher-researchers testified to the importance of encouraging students to establish connections to place and people through a variety of experiential learning opportunities. Students involved in this research project participated in a number of excursions including visiting the RIIS site, the site of Qu'Appelle Industrial School with an Elder, places within the community to examine place names and statues, and the Royal Saskatchewan Museum. As Rory reflects on his class trip to Lebret, he notes that the excursion, "definitely gave it a more real feeling ... watching movies did this but actually going to the site made that connection much stronger. Especially being so close to Regina " While they may not be new strategies, it is important to be mindful of their transformative pedagogical effects, particularly as they facilitate more authentic engagement with difficult topics and histories.

Another critical realization during this project was the need to explicitly teach about whiteness and its (re)structuring forces in order to make explicit forces which often remain invisible. Recognizing the mainstream education as a whole and schools in particular often operate within "larger systems that privilege certain students, certain knowledge, certain ways of being—at the expense of other students, other knowledge, other ways of being in the world" (Thompkins, 2002, p.408), we often discussed the need to explicitly teach for an understanding of ongoing colonial practices that continue to perpetuate systemic inequities, discrimination, and racism which empower those racialized white and marginalize and oppress those racialized non-white. Often these explicit teachings involved attempts to make visible relations between those who are privileged and those who are oppressed. Specific examples of classroom activities include the purposeful consideration of dominant discourses and nationalist narratives as a way of examining how

they (re)inscribe inequitable power relations and (re)create differential accesses to power. For example in Teye's history class, students considered the government's purposeful slaughter of the buffalo as a means to starve First Nations in the West, compelling them to sign treaties. After considering the legitimacy of these treaties as authentic choices, students considered who benefitted from the signing of treaties both historically and today. Students were then challenged to consider how such realities compared to the discourses that construct Indigenous peoples as the primary beneficiaries of treaty. They then considered how discourses produce identities differently, creating certain subject positions within national narratives.

In another instance, Sarah reflected on the use of language, and in particular grammar in her classroom.

linguistics is only one way of learning a language I realize I am so colonized and used to doing things one way ... This makes me question my grammar wall in my room – I put up so many grammar memes discussing perfect tense, comma placement and spelling that I forget all of these terms and rules were created by colonization. In fact, a colleague of mine, while discussing a grammar issue ... put me in my place by reminding me that the rules I follow for language are an example of colonialism. It is truly amazing how much of my world I forget was created in this lens of colonialism

She went on to reflect on the work of critical scholar Lisa Delpit, noting that:

grammar allows access to different listeners and different power. Along with reflecting on how the need for grammar is a part of colonialism, what has been new for me is realizing that using grammar, and using it correctly, creates a power differential between those who do not use it correctly.

As a research group, we discussed how these critical topics and conversations were a crucial component in reconciliation education. Without problematizing the white colonial structures and spaces in which we live and work, little authentic progress towards (re)balancing relationships will be made.

Another critical approach we deemed necessary in order to disrupt (re)structuring forces of whiteness was to unsettle the reliance of students on victimization narratives and other approaches steeped in deficit thinking when sharing the narratives and perspectives of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. Rather than solely focusing on the actions of European colonizers and governments to tell stories of colonization and thereby constructing Indigenous peoples to be passive victims of these policies and practices, we acknowledged the importance of using strength-based approaches with resources and activities that make central the stories of active resilience and resistance demonstrated by Indigenous peoples throughout our shared history. Jesse spoke to this realization following her experience with KAIROS Blanket Exercise. She noted, "resistance, it must have happened, and where are those stories"? To teach about and for resistance and resilience,

students in Haley's classroom were challenged to consider what she called "Indigenous resistance fighters" throughout history. These examinations included narratives of empowerment and resilience rather than victimization. We also acknowledged the need to consider present-day examples of resistance to colonial policies and resilience as we followed the work of movements like Idle No More, organizations like the Assembly of First Nations, or individuals like Cindy Blackstock. Personal narratives shared by Life Speaker Noel Starblanket and Gary Edwards at All Nations Hope Network served to illustrate to our research team the importance of these perspectives in our attempts to honour Indigenous empowerment and resilience.

While these realizations were noted throughout our research project, it is important to acknowledge that there is not *one right way* or *one ideal set* of materials to support students in understanding the history and effects of the residential school policy and to engage authentically in truth and reconciliation education. Multiple approaches and multiple resources are available and appropriate in a variety of teaching and learning spaces. Above all else, we continue to acknowledge the importance of knowing the students we are alongside and their readiness to (re)learn this difficult knowledge. Their level of readiness (as well as our own), as we experienced throughout the research project, can and does influence the learning they are able to do.

What follows is also a more detailed discussion of the importance of knowing ourselves and where we are in our personal journey of reconciliation. In what ways are we, as teachers, ready to contribute more meaningfully and substantively to this work and what work remains for us to tackle? As a research team, we have come to appreciate the ways in which we live our journeys as both individual and collective. We continue to work toward reconciliation through our learning and teaching but are mindful of all that remains to be done to move reconciliation from aspiration to reality.

The Importance of Knowing Ourselves and Where We Are on Our Own Journeys of Reconciliation

Systemic Challenges

The members of this research group shared a number of common interests. Perhaps most obvious is our shared commitment to social justice. In fact, five of eight members of the group have completed (or are in the midst of completing) graduate degrees focused on a variety of critical social justice issues. The central focus of this research project is truth and reconciliation education. While none of us are experts in this work, we have all expressed a commitment to achieving systemic change. There were however paradoxes between our desire to challenge colonialism and our lived experiences within our classrooms. For many of us, these realizations were the most powerful ones.

Some of the challenges of this work included systemic issues inherent in our schools and school system. As noted by Tupper & Cappello (2008), "mainstream education is an extension of colonization insofar as it has been used to promote a dominant narrative of the past and privilege certain ways of knowing" (p.563). Throughout this research, we discussed several examples of the ways in which the structure of schooling in our buildings stifled critical pedagogical approaches and authentic work toward reconciliation. For example, Jameson highlighted some ways in which he was challenged to disrupt normalized practices in his classroom.

Secondary mathematics has certain hegemonic tendencies as it relates to classroom expectations; examples, assignments, and exams are the primary way of teaching and assessing. Breaking away from this creates certain challenges: students are not accustomed to other forms of instruction and assessment and resources are difficult to find and equally difficult to create.

Jameson went on to note how students responded to disruptions of common practices, “numerous times students asked in class, ‘will this be on the test’? or ‘will this be on the final’”? Examples of resistance already discussed in this report speak to the ways in which students challenged the opportunity to take up and learn from difficult knowledge.

We also noted ways in which policies were made and enacted within our schools to limit the effectiveness of critical work. For example, one of the research sites was involved in piloting a smudging policy for the division. While the act of authentically including Indigenous practices like smudging within the school seems important, various obstacles make uptake by teachers and students difficult. Before students were able to participate in a smudge, permission forms needed to be sent home, signed by parents and returned. The extra effort required and follow up needed may hinder classroom teachers from taking up these opportunities with their students. Interestingly, these same obstacles did not occur when Christian practices, such as saying the Lord’s Prayer, were included past school practice. Rather, they were simply part of the everyday life in schools. In an attempt to address these issues, the school has now included the permission form for participating in a smudge within the student registration package. This is one small step, but not all schools in the division have adopted the practice.

Timetabling and budgetary constraints were also discussed as having an effect upon the critical work being done in these schools. While we were heartened as we considered the diverse programming (that included Indigenous worldviews, beliefs, practices, and ways of being) on offer in different schools and the opportunities to participate in community programming, it was disappointing to realize the limited uptake amongst many of our teacher colleagues. As a group, we also discussed our concerns that not all schools in the division have Aboriginal advocates, Elders-in-Residence, or programs such as Indigenous language classes. Interestingly within this school division, only schools with larger percentages of Indigenous students are granted the funding to secure these additional supports. While at first glance this may seem justifiable, we considered the ways in which this practice framed Indigenous knowledge, perspectives, and ways of knowing. Rather than presenting these as critical for all students, this practice constructs Indigenous knowledge, perspectives, and ways of knowing as appropriate for Indigenous students. As such, dominant colonial white settler knowledge, perspectives, and ways of knowing are less likely to be problematized in schools with predominantly non-Indigenous students. Any Indigenous knowledge, perspectives, and ways of knowing that are shared in mostly white-settler schools run the risk of being, “delimited in expressly subjective and cultural terms that make them relevant only to those who live according to those knowledges” (Donald, 2009b, p.338). Teacher-researcher Jesse also spoke to impact these limitations has on students in her classroom.

I don't understand how it's feasible for one school to be considered not important enough to have a support such as an Aboriginal advocate ... I get the funding and I get all those things come into play, but the way that I've seen my students absorb the information when they've had people such as kookum Brenda or Noel Starblanket or even just some people in the community, when they've had the opportunity to ask questions.

While some of these systemic issues may seem to be inherent in running a public school system, it is important to be attentive to the ways in which they perpetuate whiteness and colonialism making the possibility for authentic reconciliation extremely difficult.

Other challenges we encountered were of a much more personal nature. It became increasingly apparent that our commitment to truth and reconciliation education is life work for us all. This process of attempting to engage in anti-colonial teaching and learning in ways that make authentic reconciliation possible was at times overwhelming for us all. While we were able to recognize our successes, we came to be acutely aware of the need for our own pedagogical improvement and the many ways in which we believed we still fell short of achieving our aims.

The Gift of Humility

A tension that exists for many classroom teachers (not just those in this project) emerges from the belief that expertise in content knowledge is required in order to teach something well. In the context of this project specifically, and truth and reconciliation education more broadly, it became apparent that the discourse of *teacher as expert* could have deleterious effects on our abilities to take up difficult knowledge that we were often engaging with for the first time. As such, the role of humility, and the gift that it offers us, is important to consider. As teacher researchers, we came to appreciate, because of our own past educational experiences that did not centre colonialism or Indigenous knowledge, content, and perspectives, that we too are learners. We realized that we didn't and couldn't know everything, that we would (and did) make mistakes in what and how we taught. Rather than allowing mistakes or what we perceived to be poor pedagogical choices to debilitate us, we chose instead to use them as opportunities for growth. Jameson shared, "I'll start by confessing that I did not bring an Elder into my classroom, I regret not making that happen ... next year, I will not let such an opportunity pass by, my students would have benefited from such an opportunity." In this example, Jameson does not make excuses for his choice. Instead, he makes a commitment to doing differently next time. Jill shared her own reflections on the value of humility stating, "I wonder if I can add a sense of humility on behalf of settlers, in particular, to be open to what we don't know and how biased and racist some of our seemingly neutral comments and understandings really are"? Indigenous scholar Chelsea Vowel (2016) expresses concern about "the sheer volume of stereotypes" white settlers have about Indigenous peoples and the significant challenge for Indigenous peoples of combating so much misinformation (p. 88). If white settlers are to move from defensiveness to accountability when they reproduce stereotypes and misinformation, then humility is critical. As teachers, talking with one another and with our students about our mistakes and the ways we unintentionally reproduce bias requires not only a rejection of the *teacher as expert* discourse discussed earlier, it requires humility, and this became increasingly clear to us as a research team.

Awareness and Understanding

Connected to humility, as a research group, we discussed the importance of being aware of the limitations of our own and our students' awareness and understanding specific to Canada's historical and contemporary relationship with Indigenous peoples. Christie spoke about her own emerging knowledge about Canada's colonial history and how much she valued being able to "develop a relationship with [the Elder] and developing a relationship with people who are experiencing the same difficulties that I am so that I can bounce those ideas off." She goes on to discuss the value for her and her students in having Indigenous peoples in the classroom sharing traditional knowledge. She offers, "some of the biggest comments [from students] that came from out of this is why don't we have more of this in our education system today" and that, "I saw their knowledge of history and of how we've transitioned through our relationship between Canadians, government and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people." In discussing her students' responses to a particular place-based learning experience, Haley noted, "they didn't have a lot of the background knowledge, even though if you asked them they would've said that they did ... so it was often tough, because I think I was asking them to go, kind of, higher level without filling some of that background knowledge and those gaps." These examples highlight the importance of being attentive to the various levels of knowledge and understanding that students bring to the classroom.

At the outset of the project when we came together as teacher-researchers, and much like our students, we did so with various levels of colonial awareness and understanding. Our discussions and the learning each of us did as part of the project, through our shared readings, our time with the Elder, and our visits to the Royal Saskatchewan Museum, the RIIS cemetery on Pinkie Road, All Nations Hope Network, and the RCMP Heritage Centre, allowed us to gain a deeper awareness of where our knowledge was lacking, why it might be lacking, and what we needed to do individually and collectively to better understand the history and legacies of residential schools and of colonialism in Canada. For Christie, establishing relationships with and learning from Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers was critical, and Jesse echoed the importance of this as well. For all of the teacher researchers involved in the study, our time together as a professional learning community was particularly meaningful, contributing to our personal and professional growth.

Encountering our own Privilege

Part of our growing awareness and understanding of colonialism and the structuring forces of whiteness included considerations of our own privileges as white settler educators who have the luxury of engaging in anti-colonial teaching as much or as little as desired and who also have the luxury of stepping away from the work when we are feeling saddened, frustrated, or exhausted by it. Rachel reflected on this reality when she noted:

... my A30 was that exact conversation, about the experiences of indigenous people and that, as a white person, I can choose to just stop thinking about it for a little bit, but how my cousins, who both self-identify as indigenous, that's not something that they can do, and so it's all the more important that I avoid stepping away, and try to contextualize it for my students, within the fact that this is something that, as other people have said, I'm still struggling with myself; but it

makes it all the more important that we do, like consciously engage with it, to ensure that we are critiquing our own ways of thinking, and acknowledging that it is not the only way of thinking.

Haley shared a conversation she had with some of her students which led her to acknowledge, "I can step away, I can choose to not fight." She went on to describe:

my realization of my ability to not (engage) ... To step away and just (maintain the status quo) ... I can just be me, right? ... like the privilege that I have ... that privilege allows me to think that way. It's not a privilege that everybody gets, right? And even to say the colleagues, I had an off day. They're like oh, you're so good, but you don't often have off days and you've been ... you know, like how we reproduce the narratives of good teaching.

Haley's observation about how she was perceived to be a good teacher can be read as a privilege insofar as *good teaching* for white settler teachers simply requires making any effort at all to integrate Indigenous content and perspectives in classroom, even when the pedagogy is poor, we have bad days and our efforts fall short.

In her reflections Taye describes her own feelings of tension about how her privilege affords her the opportunity to step away from unsettling narratives and difficult knowledge. She notes,

I've used my privilege to stay away from the really difficult personal stories at times, because I know in theory what happened and I just, I've put the books down so that I don't, because I just can't handle reading them. But since our last time that we met I've forced myself to watch *We Were Children* and to do some of this reading.

Following our visit to the RIIS cemetery, Taye reflects on the tension emerging from a heightened awareness of her privilege, sharing,

and so then today being in that place, all I could think of is how my six-year-old daughter is worried about the doll she's going to get for Christmas. And I worry all morning when they go on a field trip if I've sent her with warm enough clothes or if she has enough snacks. And just the different lived experience in this space that we've been able to have than what so many other people have had, and the horror of the fact that we'd do that with being able to not acknowledge what our existence in this place has meant for so many other people. So as I walked around today, I thought of all the other six year olds and what they experienced in this place, which is part of the reason that I need to be committed to reconciliation.

Throughout the research project, woven through our many discussions and reflections, was

this ongoing recognition that we must be attentive to our own white settler privilege if we are to be in ethical relationship as allies with Indigenous peoples. Barker (2010) reminds us:

to be an ally first requires recognition of the need for action in a real and present struggle: in this case, the struggle for indigenous resurgence against colonial and neo-colonial power, within Canada and globally. But after this recognition, it is no easy thing to be a Settler person committed to acting as an Indigenous ally; combinations of active social and cultural pressures, passive understandings of 'normal' and internal psychological and emotional barriers often create paralysis for Settlers attempting to act in de/anti-colonial ways (p. 316).

We came to realize that the privilege of stepping away from active consideration of Indigenous issues was often because of our own emotional responses to the harrowing experiences of Indigenous peoples because of colonial policies and the Indian Residential School system. This is a privilege that is not afforded to Indigenous peoples who continue to live in the midst of colonialism, its legacies, and ongoing effects. In his article *So You Call Yourself an Ally* Jamie Utt (2013) writes:

The thing about oppression is that it is constant. Those who are oppressed and marginalized in our society do not get to take breaks and respites. Thus, if you truly want to act in solidarity, you cannot simply retreat into your privilege when you just don't want to engage ... And in the end, part of the privilege of your identity is that you have a choice about whether or not to resist oppression. And falling back into your privilege, especially when you are most needed, is not being in solidarity (np).

As teacher-researchers, if we truly want to be in solidarity and ethical relationship with Indigenous peoples, we have to stop stepping away from the work just because we are feeling tired or emotionally drained. It has to be front of mind. Always.

Further Insights

This research project and the findings emerging from it provide insight into the challenges and possibilities of teaching about residential schools and colonialism in Canada. As we have discussed, the project afforded us an opportunity to explore the effectiveness of various pedagogical strategies, consider the importance of ethical relationships with Indigenous peoples, understand and respond to student resistances to difficult knowledge, and ultimately to learn and grow as educators committed to truth and reconciliation education. Through our conversations, readings, and learning experiences, we came to more deeply understand how we and our students are structured by colonial narratives. They are pervasive and their pervasiveness makes them all the more challenging to disrupt. However, we came to appreciate the possibilities that various pedagogical interventions offer for disruption. The value of place-based learning opportunities for students (and for us) was clear through the data, as students described the significance of learning experiences outside the classroom, including and especially, time spent at the RIIS cemetery. Our efforts to invite our students to learn from and alongside Indigenous knowledge keepers and Elders were critical in broadening knowledge and understanding, and in helping students work through their own feelings of guilt that arose from learning about our colonial past and present. Also important was helping students to make meaningful and authentic connections to the material so that it was not just seen to be disconnected content they were required to learn. While we weren't always successful in connecting students to the content, we found it was more likely to happen when students took ownership for their learning and a variety of pedagogical strategies were used.

Throughout this project, it has been made abundantly clear that authentic engagement in truth and reconciliation education is an ongoing process that is fraught not only with pedagogical challenges but also personal ones. As settler Canadian teachers, the continual deconstruction and reconstruction of our identities requires genuine humility and authentic connections with Indigenous knowledge, perspectives, and experiences. Drawing on the work of Roger Simon, Indigenous scholar Susan Dion (2009) reminds us that the call to ethical learning "impels us into a confrontation and reckoning, not only with stories of the past but also with ourselves as we are (historically, existentially, ethically) in the present" (p. 187). As teacher-researchers, we invited our students and one another into stories of Canada's colonial past and present that include careful considerations of "the missteps of history" so that we might imagine a different future for Indigenous-settler relations (King, 2012, 264). For us, this is at the heart of reconciliation. While resistances to learning about colonialism and the history and legacies of residential schools manifested themselves in

many different ways during the research, we were heartened when students demonstrated a deep engagement with the learning; when they interrogated colonialism and its effects; when they could make connections between historical injustices and contemporary realities for Indigenous peoples; and when they desired to learn more.

Certainly not every student came to think differently about what it means to be a Canadian citizen, but the invitation to do so remains open as they continue to reflect, think, and grow through their exposure to difficult, disruptive knowledge. Given the “deep refusal to see colonization as occurring in the present, and blinding to the realities of how the distinct kind of colonialism operating in Canada today targets Indigenous peoples and continues to define the lives of Canadians” (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 3), and given that the system of Indian residential schools in Canada is a direct result of colonialism, this research project afforded us the opportunity to confront colonial ignorance, inviting students into a different consideration of Canada and themselves as Canadians. While many of the students were initially surprised to learn about the legacies and ongoing effects of residential schools, their ability to make these connections between the past and present helped to disrupt a belief that residential schools are a thing of the past and Indigenous peoples should just move on. Students also began to question dominant narratives of Canada, necessary if historical consciousness is to shift. However, we recognize that moving from truth to reconciliation requires more than simply knowing differently. It requires allyship and action. As teachers, we are mindful of this as we carry our learning forward, continuing to do differently in our classrooms so that one day reconciliation becomes more than an aspiration; it becomes reality.

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