

# Niinwi - Kiinwa - Kiinwi: Building Non-Indigenous Allies in Education through Indigenous Pedagogy

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## Abstract

In this article, we examine the *Calls to Action* of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada (TRC, 2015a) in light of their implications for conscious ally-building in teacher education. Guided by the Anishinaabemowin language, the Medicine Wheel, and the Seven Grandfather Teachings, we ask what we can do to move from *niinwi*, “we but not you,” and *kiinwa*, “you all but not us,” to *kiinwi*, “you and us (together).” We arrive at the conclusion that reconciliatory education can be accomplished through respect and love, alongside an unyielding commitment to honouring Indigeneity, speaking truth, and building wisdom.

*Keywords:* reconciliation, ally-building, teacher education, Aboriginal education, Medicine Wheel, Seven Grandfather Teachings, anti-racism, decolonization, Indigenous education

## Résumé

Dans cet article, nous examinons les *Appels à l'Action* de la Commission de Vérité et Réconciliation (CVR) du Canada (2015a) au vu de leurs implications pour la construction consciente d'alliés dans la formation des enseignant(e)s. Guidées par la langue Anishinaabemowin, la Roue Médicinale, et les Enseignements des Sept Grand-Pères, nous demandons ce que nous pouvons faire pour passer de *niinwi* « nous mais pas vous », et *kiinwa* « vous mais pas nous », à *kiinwi* « vous et nous (ensemble) ». Nous arrivons à la conclusion qu'on peut accomplir l'éducation réconciliatrice par le respect et l'amour, ainsi qu'un engagement inébranlable à honorer l'indigénité, à dire la vérité, et à édifier la sagesse.

*Mots-clés :* réconciliation, construction d'alliés, formation à l'enseignement, éducation autochtone, Roue Médicinale, Enseignements des Sept Grand-Pères, antiracisme, décolonisation

## **Introduction**

This is an exciting and important time to be engaged in Indigenous teacher education in Canada. The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has brought attention to our field, and many of our institutions are placing an emphasis on Indigenous education and reconciliation to a degree that has never been seen before. However, the great opportunity this yields also brings great responsibility. Most notably, as Senator Murray Sinclair, chair of the TRC, stated, “Reconciliation is not an Aboriginal problem, it is a Canadian problem. It involves all of us” (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation [CBC], 2015). However, the concept of reconciliation, and its societal implications if enacted, may not be fully understood by all Canadians; for some, reconciliation may become about assuaging settler guilt, or about engaging in projects or financial investments in an attempt to “save” Indigenous peoples from current socio-economic and cultural realities. This is reconciliation that is led by the colonizer. When approached in this way, reconciliation is an artificial concept because it only scratches the surface of the deep-seated historical and current inequalities that affect our society. The problem with this approach is compounded by the fact that in this framework, we continue to perceive reconciliation from a Western, Eurocentric perspective without delving into what Indigenous teachings tell us about ethical interactions with one another. Thus, attempts at reconciliation can continue to marginalize Indigenous peoples even in a process that is meant to emancipate them. True reconciliation requires us to engage Indigenous philosophies on ethical intercultural interactions, and strive to create meaningful, deep societal change where Indigenous and Western perspectives are treated with the same consideration. To this end, in this article we describe our professional practice working as teacher educators and ally-builders in an Indigenous education program with a high proportion of non-Indigenous students.

## **Positionality and Experience**

Our perspective is informed by our personal and professional experience. Lindsay Morcom is of Algonquin Métis heritage with 15 years of experience in Indigenous languages and education, while Kate Freeman is a settler ally with more than 30 years of experience in Indigenous education and Indigenous rights advocacy. As the Faculty

Coordinator and the Manager of the Queen's University Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (ATEP), we work in close collaboration to develop and deliver a community-based program that has over 400 graduates, the majority of whom are Indigenous. Community-based ATEP has been offered continuously since 1991. Over the years, Queen's University's Faculty of Education has partnered with a total of six Indigenous post-secondary education institutes and organizations to offer community-based programming that reflects regional needs and mandates. Currently, we have programs offered in partnership with the Seven Generations Education Institute (SGEI) in Kenora and Rainy River in northwestern Ontario, and Kenjgewin Teg, serving Manitoulin Island and the north shore of Lake Huron. We also offer a campus-based program that is integrated into our mainstream Bachelor of Education program. Most years, the class of campus-based ATEP is approximately half Indigenous and half non-Indigenous students. The majority of our non-Indigenous students identify as being of European ancestry and are Canadian-born, although in recent years we have seen an increase in non-Euro-Canadian students and newcomer students of diverse heritages.

For the purposes of this article, we will focus on our work with the campus-based ATEP program at Queen's University. The demographic reality of our institution presents us with unique opportunities and challenges. With respect to ATEP classes, having an approximate 50/50 mix of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, we are privy to unique perspectives from their diverse experiences. We are also able to model in our work and our relationships with one another how respectful relations can be carried out. In the larger scope of Queen's University, the vast majority of the student body, faculty, and staff are non-Indigenous. Approximately 2% of the student body identifies as Indigenous (Queen's University, 2017). As of 2016, 1.3% of faculty and 2% of staff at the university identify as Indigenous (Equity Office, 2017). On one hand, it can be difficult at times, due to the lack of representation, to familiarize students with the realities of Indigenous history, modern experience, cultures, and knowledges. On the other hand, reconciliation must be a bi-directional effort; if we are able to impress upon our students their roles and responsibilities with respect to reconciliation, we have the opportunity to create significant positive societal change.

## **Calls to Action and Other Works Influencing Our Approach**

### **Pertinent Calls to Action**

While many of the *Calls to Action* (TRC, 2015a) can be related to education, certain ones relate more directly than others to our work as educators and researchers in a faculty of education. Two calls in particular direct us to engage education as a tool for reconciliation. Call to Action 62 requires the development of curriculum and integration of knowledge on Indigenous historical and contemporary issues in primary and secondary education, along with the provision of funding to integrate Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy into classrooms and the establishment of government oversight to accomplish this. Call to Action 63 requires the development of curriculum, integration of content, and training of teachers to advance awareness of the history and legacy of residential schools, along with tools for “building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect” (p. 7).

Furthermore, several other Calls to Action pertain to us as researchers and educators in terms of the direction of our research and teaching and our contributions to public policy. Call to Action 10 requires legislation aimed at closing education achievement gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, including curriculum development and funding disparities. Legislation must also be developed to advance the teaching and propagation of Indigenous languages, to enable parental engagement in Indigenous education, and to respect and honour treaty relationships. Such policy should be based in evidence-based research, and it is incumbent upon us to engage in this research and mobilize it to create change. Similarly, Call to Action 10 requires “post-secondary institutions to create university and college degree and diploma programs in Aboriginal languages” (p. 2). That will necessitate and enhance research on Indigenous languages, both in terms of linguistics and pedagogy. Finally, Call to Action 65 requires collaborative support from the federal government, Indigenous peoples, education institutes, and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation to engage in research to advance reconciliation, which also directs the trajectory of our research.

These Calls to Action have two overarching themes. They call on us to raise awareness of Indigenous peoples, cultures, histories, and intellectual traditions in

non-Indigenous learners as well as to create meaningful and accessible learning opportunities for Indigenous learners. To accomplish these goals we must have teachers of diverse heritages who have strong knowledge bases and understandings of why this education is necessary, who are confident and well-informed enough to develop appropriate content to bring Indigenous concepts into their classrooms in partnership with families and communities, and who have the pedagogical skills to teach about them in an appropriate way. These individuals must have access to Indigenous knowledge and see it incorporated and privileged throughout their university careers, and particularly during their Bachelor of Education studies. The second overarching theme is equality of access to education and funding. To achieve equality, we must develop social justice-oriented teachers who can identify educational and financial inequality and have the capacity to advocate effectively for change.

### **Reconciliation at Queen's University**

We are also at an important time in the history of Queen's University. In response to the *Calls to Action* (TRC, 2015a), Queen's University assembled a Truth and Reconciliation Commission Task Force in April 2016:

[The task force was] composed of Indigenous and non-Indigenous faculty, staff, students, senior administrators, and community members... The task force considered how the university can play an active role in addressing the broader themes of the TRC report, including relationship building, changing perspectives and policy, and promoting an awareness of the rights, histories, and contemporary issues of Indigenous peoples. (Queen's University, 2017, p. 4)

To accomplish this goal, the task force engaged in numerous meetings with groups within and external to the university. Task force members who were also senior university administrators travelled to our partner institution, Kenjgewin Teg, and met there with community members, First Nations government representatives, and staff and students. The results of these consultations formed the basis of the document *Yakwanastahentéha: Aankenjigemi: Extending the Rafters: Truth and Reconciliation Commission Task Force Final Report* (Queen's University, 2017). The recommendations presented in this report are being taken seriously by the university, and plans are already underway to put them

into action. Many of these recommendations apply to ATEP and the Faculty of Education, which presents us with further opportunities to teach for reconciliation.

Even while teaching for reconciliation, we understand this to be a fraught term. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission defines reconciliation as “an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships.” Certainly, at times this definition seems unreachably lofty in a country whose history and current events are so marred by disrespect towards Indigenous peoples, cultures, and knowledges. For this reason, we understand our work to be a journey without a fixed destination; we also understand that we will need to invest our entire careers in this work and that even after that point we will likely not be in a place of true, universal reconciliation and mutual respect as a nation. However, we also understand that we are both called by our communities and our ancestors to still put all we can into walking the path of reconciliation alongside our successive generations of students. We follow Senator Sinclair’s statement, “You don’t have to believe that reconciliation *will* happen; you have to believe that reconciliation *should* [emphasis in original spoken text] happen” (CBC, 2015).

## **Indigenous Philosophies and Reconciliatory Education**

Our commitment to reconciliatory education is informed not only by current events relating to the TRC, but also by Indigenous philosophies. We look primarily to Anishinaabe educational and spiritual philosophies. There are several reasons for this. First, one of us (Lindsay Morcom) is of Anishinaabe heritage, while the other (Kate Freeman) has spent much of her professional life thus far working within an Anishinaabe context as a strong ally. We have both been educated in an Anishinaabe or larger Algonquian context, and this education informs our perspectives. Second, our partner communities are currently Anishinaabe, and our community-based program has operated continuously in Anishinaabe First Nations territory for more than 25 years. This makes our approach directly relevant to our students and community partners. Finally, the campus of Queen’s University sits on shared Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee territory, which means that our approach is also directly relevant to the local community, many of our campus-based students, and the land on which we live and work.

## Reconciliatory Education as Guided by Anishinaabewin

*Anishinaabewin*—Anishinaabe philosophy, worldview, culture, and spirituality—is a primary source of information and guidance in our teaching. Our perspective on reconciliatory education is informed first by the Anishinaabemowin language. Like other Algonquian languages, Anishinaabemowin differentiates between ‘we (exclusive)’ meaning ‘we but not you,’ and ‘we (inclusive)’ meaning ‘we/us and you together.’<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the inclusive ‘we’ pronoun combines elements of exclusive ‘we’ and the second person plural (Valentine, 2001, p. 122):

- (1) *niinwi*  
1PL.EXCL.  
‘we (but not you)’
- (2) *giinwaa*  
2PL.  
‘you all (but not us)’
- (3) *giinwi*  
1PL.INCL.  
‘you and me/us (together)’

While the goal of reconciliation is certainly not amalgamation or assimilation, reflecting on this grammar leads us to ask how we can move from the solitudes of *niinwi*, “we (but not you),” and *giinwa*, “you all (but not us),” to *giinwaa*, “you and me/us (together).” Such reflections inform how we interact with our students and how we expect them to interact with one another. We put a great deal of time and energy into creating community amongst campus-based ATEP students through feasts and social events. While we privilege Indigenous knowledge, we ensure that all our students feel heard in our classes,

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1 Inclusive ‘we’ refers to more than one person, including the speaker but not the hearer. Exclusive ‘we’ refers to the speaker and the hearer (and possibly other people). The forms of these pronouns vary across Anishinaabemowin dialects (Valentine, 2001).



and we create safe spaces to ask difficult questions by reminding our students that we all have different experiences and knowledge bases. We empower our students to engage in change and peer education within the faculty and university by encouraging them to focus on Indigenous learning in their other classes and helping them set up awareness-raising events for other students. In this way, we create a group where the students see themselves as *giinwaa*. We model respect and instill an understanding of others as *all my relations* (Couture, 1991; Ermine, 1995; Corbiere, 2000). We also connect our work to the concept of responsibility to the last and next seven generations through class content, discussions, and Elder visits. We critically examine colonization and systems of privilege as they existed in the past and exist today; and we explore residential schools, their causes, and their lasting intergenerational effects. We talk about what we can do to protect future generations and ensure that they can live in mutual respect.

Our attempt to work toward this goal is informed from an Anishinaabe perspective based on the Medicine Wheel and the Seven Grandfather Teachings. The Seven Grandfather Teachings are a set of characteristics that guide us on how we can live a good life, or *mino-bimaadiziwin*. They are honesty, humility, respect, bravery, wisdom, truth, and love (Benton-Benai, 1988; Bouchard & Martin, 2009). These teachings are connected to the Medicine Wheel, in a three-dimensional sacred cosmology involving the four directions, the sky, the earth, and the centre (Bouchard & Martin, 2009). The teachings provide ethical guidance as we explore the meaning and enactment of reconciliation. The Medicine Wheel is a visual representation of many concepts, all of which focus on inter-relatedness and connectedness between various aspects of the person, of time, and of creation. As such, it represents a sacred cosmology that connects one's internal and external worlds meaningfully. The Medicine Wheel is not unique to the Anishinaabeg, and its colours and orientation vary across geographic regions and Nations. However, the teachings connected to it are generally similar, with a focus on positioning oneself within the world in a relational way and walking a good path (Corbiere, 2000; Ball & Pence, 2006; Bouchard & Martin, 2009; Andreotti, Ahenakew, & Cooper, 2011; Toulouse, 2011; Chartrand, 2012; Ray & Cormier, 2012; Kitchen & Raynor, 2013; Goulet & Goulet, 2014). While a full understanding of all the elements of the Medicine Wheel takes many years of learning and is certainly not in the scope of this article, the concept of the nature of the person as being composed of an emotional, physical, spiritual, and intellectual self is contained within it (Yearington, 2010). This gives us insight as to how we can engage reconciliation

from an Anishinaabe perspective in the classroom. In other words, reconciliation is not just about ascertaining what teachers need to know to engage reconciliation in their classrooms; it is also about how they understand it, how they feel it, what they do for it, and how they honour it. In our classes, we teach about the Medicine Wheel and the Seven Grandfather Teachings, and we are guided by them in our work and our interactions.

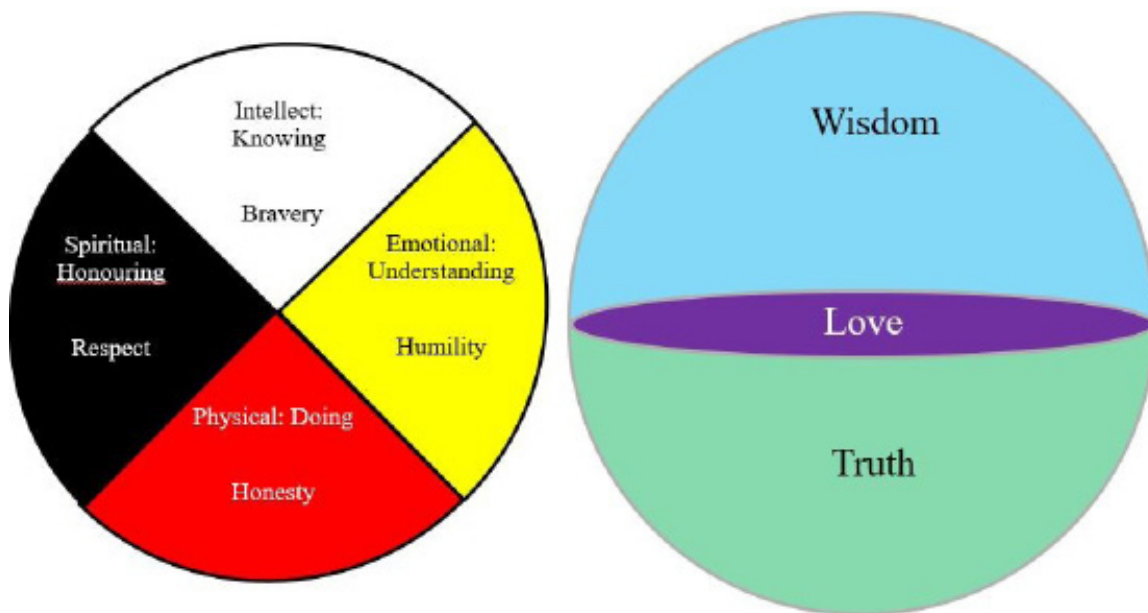


Figure 1. The Medicine Wheel and the Seven Grandfather Teachings

We understand that the connections between the human domains and directions vary across different geographical locations, cultural perspectives, and individual Knowledge Keepers (D. Bouchard, personal communication, April 17, 2018; Yearington, 2010; see also Toulouse, 2011). This orientation of the emotional, physical, spiritual, and intellectual is specifically based in Anishinaabe teachings, but these are not universally shared across all Anishinaabe Knowledge Keepers and communities (Yearington, 2010). We understand that not all Anishinaabeg connect the Seven Grandfather Teachings to the Medicine Wheel in this way, if at all (T. Yearington, personal communication, April 16, 2018). Finally, we feel it necessary to state that we are not Elders or Knowledge Keepers. It is our goal to examine our teaching practice in light of knowledge that has been passed to us and to honour the richness of these teachings. We are grateful for the knowledge

that has been shared with us. We hope we have done it justice, and we take responsibility for any misinterpretations or miscommunications.<sup>2</sup>

### **The North: Knowledge and Bravery**

Although traditionally a path following the Medicine Wheel begins in the east, we begin our discussion in the north by asking the following question: What do teacher candidates and new teachers need to know to engage in reconciliation? We begin here for two reasons. First, the structure of Western education focuses on knowledge building, and as such, this is what students enter the ATEP classroom expecting. Second, the TRC's Calls to Action, particularly numbers 62 and 63, focus very much on awareness and knowledge building with respect to education. Knowledge lays a foundation from which all other aspects of the person can be reached in order to develop allies in a holistic way.

Many teacher candidates enter university with very little knowledge about Indigenous peoples. Indigenous content has been limited in provincial curricula. While there has been some improvement of late, we still encounter many teacher candidates who completed elementary and secondary school prior to more recent Indigenous efforts, or whose teachers were unequipped to offer Indigenous content or pedagogy as part of the curriculum. These teacher candidates have not been exposed to factual, accurate content about Indigenous peoples (Kanu, 2005, 2006). Indigenous content may also be absent from students' university experiences, depending on their course of study and institution. In ATEP, many of our students have focused on Indigenous Studies, Indigenous languages, or other related subjects, and arrive at their Bachelor of Education well-versed in Indigenous content. Others, however, arrive with keen interest but limited knowledge. This wide range of knowledge and experience requires us to find ways to engage all of our students while ensuring everyone leaves with a strong knowledge base in Indigenous content.

The knowledge base that new teachers must have to teach for reconciliation is broad. First, we must offer an alternative narrative to that presented in most schools, where Euro-Canadian perspectives and stories are privileged (Tupper & Capello, 2008;

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<sup>2</sup> We are grateful to Tim Yearington and David Bouchard for their guidance on this section of our article and for the Medicine Wheel teachings they have shared with us.

Godlewska, Moore, & Bednasek, 2010; Bissell & Korteweg, 2016). While recent efforts in Indigenizing school curricula present significant improvements over curricula of the past, Indigenous content in schools is still minimal. As Tupper and Capello (2008) point out, “At a simplistic level, curriculum documents privilege certain content over others: some material gets included and other material gets left out. Naturally, curricula are limited and therefore give preferential treatment to some visions/content/stories over others” (p. 566). Even where Indigenous content inclusion has improved in curriculum documents, teachers who were educated prior to Indigenization efforts may not possess the knowledge or skill to teach appropriately about Indigenous peoples (Bissell & Korteweg, 2016). It is therefore incumbent upon us to identify what is missing and present students with Indigenous perspectives on history and current events to fill in gaps in their knowledge and beliefs (Tupper & Capello, 2008; Godlewska, Moore, & Bednasek, 2010; Bissell & Korteweg, 2016). Filling the gaps means engaging in foundational work to explore a wide range of topics related to history, including Indigenous pre- and post-contact governance and culture, colonial/Canadian government policies and their effects on Indigenous peoples, Indigenous political organizations and policies, and residential schools and their connection to contemporary and modern social realities. It also means recognizing and calling out stereotypical representations of Indigenous peoples, and correcting common misconceptions about Indigenous peoples. Finally, we must encourage students to see the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations and recognize that the history of Canada is a story of diverse and interwoven peoples whose stories and perspectives all have value (Dion, 2009; Bissell & Korteweg, 2016).

We must also ensure that our students are able to balance pan-Indigenous versus localized perspectives with a knowledge of the diversity of Indigenous languages, cultures, histories, experiences, and opinions. This is a challenge because Indigenous content in various media and in the classroom is often presented as representative of all Indigenous peoples; the fact that there are more unrelated language families, and therefore more diverse cultures in Indigenous Canada than in Europe, is a fact of which many of our students are unaware. We have the good fortune of teaching on the shared territory of the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples, who speak totally unrelated languages and live very different cultures, but who have been in contact for thousands of years. We always have students from both cultures in our classes, and discussions focusing on the differences and commonalities between these groups facilitate our students’ knowledge

development. We also discuss the complexities and challenges of shared territory and treaties governing it, particularly the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt (Hall, 2003; Simpson, 2008); through this, we examine how the experience here can inform larger discussions on reconciliation.

Furthermore, our students must develop an appreciation for the sophistication of Indigenous knowledge and for the appropriate Indigenous pedagogies through which such knowledge can be explored. To facilitate their learning, we must present our students with knowledge of available resources: these include Elders and Knowledge Keepers, as well as print and multimedia and online resources. We must ensure that our students develop Indigenized media literacy and are able to vet resources appropriately for use in their classrooms. To aid our students in developing their knowledge, we use a variety of strategies. First, we use diverse resources, including guest speakers, print media, videos, and online materials. We also demonstrate Indigenous pedagogies in every class so that students gain knowledge of how to employ them, and are able to see how effective they are. Approaches to Indigenizing the classroom include emphasizing holistic education over compartmentalized subjects, engaging talking circles, and using traditional arts, crafts, activities, and land-based learning to explore curriculum.

With respect to the Seven Grandfather Teachings, the north is connected to the teaching of bravery. We understand that it takes courage for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to enter our classrooms. Both are entering a space that is imbued with a culture that is not entirely their own. For Indigenous students, our classrooms are part of the Western academy, which has historically been a place of hostility toward Indigenous cultures and knowledges. Where included at all, Indigenous cultures and knowledges have often been treated as primitive curiosities. For non-Indigenous students, especially those of Euro-Canadian culture, it takes courage to recognize their own privilege and choose to engage in the process of reconciliation. For all our students, it also takes courage to carry these teachings forward into their own future classrooms, where students, parents, colleagues, and school administrators may not welcome them. We understand that our students are brave for wanting to make positive change in education, and we commend them for it.

## **The East: Understanding and Humility**

While student development begins with knowledge, the concept of understanding takes things one step further. Knowledge engages the intellect; understanding engages the emotions and allows the student to make connections between knowledge and meaning. To accomplish a deeper sense of understanding, we must ensure our students comprehend the value of Indigenous knowledge and Indigenization, including its benefits for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. They must understand why Indigenous content has been excluded from the curriculum. They must realize their own agency as builders of reconciliation, and see how and why they must incorporate Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy into their classrooms, regardless of who their students are.

Such understanding is vital. For many, Indigenous education is understood as education that benefits Indigenous peoples. Certainly, the creation of better educational experiences and higher educational achievement for Indigenous learners is a goal in all of our courses. However, we also see that it is necessary to Indigenize the classroom for non-Indigenous learners, since Eurocentric curriculum and pedagogy perpetuate existing inequities. As Tupper and Castello (2008) write, “The uncritical acceptance of the existing order is encouraged by and through curricula and schools where the racial realities of society are unable to enter as objects of study” (p. 566). By contrast, Indigenized curriculum and pedagogy help to dismantle existing power structures and encourage critical thinking (Tupper & Castello, 2008). By presenting alternative narratives and perspectives, particularly on historical and modern inequities, we are able to help our students unpack and examine underlying assumptions and biases in education. Such content builds an understanding of the realities of privilege and how privilege effects curriculum content and daily lived experience. We also talk and teach openly about the realities of race and privilege, including exploring the history of the concept of race, and how racism impacts society and individuals today. We discuss privilege in all of its forms, and engage intersectionality in our classroom; that is, we acknowledge that privilege comes in many forms and that individuals’ identities and experiences are constructed and influenced by numerous factors beyond race and ethnicity, including but not limited to gender/gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, socio-economic status, geography, religion/spirituality, and language. By approaching the topic in this way, our students can understand the

concept of privilege as it affects all members of society, and they can work to be allies not just to Indigenous peoples but to all marginalized peoples.

In so doing, we sometimes encounter what DiAngelo (2011) describes as “White Fragility,” which includes “anger, withdrawal, emotional incapacitation, guilt, argumentation, and cognitive dissonance (all of which reinforce the pressure on facilitators to avoid directly addressing racism)” (p. 55). Since our students have chosen to study Indigenous education, we seldom encounter anger; however, emotional incapacitation and guilt are common in our classrooms. We concur with DiAngelo (2011) that while for some this response is rooted in resistance to a challenge to non-Indigenous students’ dominant societal position, for others it is the “result of the reduced psychosocial stamina that racial insulation indicates” (p. 56).

However, it is clear that for students to challenge the dominant narrative and teach for reconciliation, they must understand their own privileges, rights, and responsibilities. We openly discuss the difference between personal guilt and benefit based in privilege, and we instruct students on what it means to honour their responsibilities to create a fairer society by using any positions of privilege they occupy to dismantle and question those positions. For example, a student who occupies a position of racial privilege is not responsible for historical injustices toward Indigenous and racialized populations, but certainly benefits from them. For this person to experience guilt is normal, but guilt cannot be allowed to be a terminal position; rather, the student must be guided to understand that racial privilege comes with a voice that others do not have. The privileged are positioned as agents of reconciliation to incite others in the same situation to question their privilege, and can draw attention to and support the voices of those less heard. Simultaneously, it is fundamental that we impress upon our students that privileged positions do not require them to “save” Indigenous peoples or any other less privileged communities; rather, they must draw attention to the narratives and goals of these communities, amplify their voices, and support them in achieving their own self-determined aims. Allies are called to reflect on both the importance of drawing attention to and supporting Indigenous narratives and goals, and the importance of “taking a back seat” to ensure that Indigenous voices are heard directly and Indigenous leadership is exercised.

To guide our students in building their understanding, we use gentle correction and constant encouragement; while knowledge development engages students’ intellect, understanding engages their emotions. As DiAngelo (2011) states, “White Fragility”

may lead those who occupy positions of racial privilege to shut down emotionally, which inhibits learning. It can be difficult at times to move past our own anger and frustration at existing societal privilege structures in order to teach about these subjects with clarity, patience, gentle correction, and constant encouragement. It is a difficult balancing act to teach in a way that encourages students to engage in difficult discussions without making room for White Fragility and Eurocentric perspectives. However, we consciously choose to see the best in our students and to understand when they ask inappropriate questions or react to new knowledge in a less-than-ideal way. We presume that our students are engaging in our courses for good reasons. We give them safe space to grow, but we also insist on efforts for growth.

The east is associated with the Grandfather Teaching of humility. Recognizing the deep societal injustices that exist and that are recreated in our education system requires humility, particularly for those students who have grown up in a Canadian society that prides itself on a national identity of niceness and politeness. As educators, recognizing our own unconscious collusion in perpetuating inequalities is hard work. Modelling this work may help support our students when they have to question their own knowledge and their own self-perceptions as Canadians and as teachers, and need enough humility to ask tough questions and to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into their understanding.

### **The South: Doing and Honesty**

Armed with knowledge and understanding, teacher candidates must now empower themselves to engage action for reconciliation. We commonly hear from teachers who confess that they exclude Indigenous perspectives from their classrooms because of a lack of knowledge, or because they fear they will make mistakes and offend someone. Such avoidance corresponds to Dion's (2009) notion of "Perfect Strangers," teachers who fail to incorporate Indigenous perspectives while claiming ignorance and are thus complicit in the perpetuation of an oppressive system. We ensure that our students are aware that failure to act on their part cultivates ignorance in non-Indigenous learners and imposes a system on Indigenous learners that silences them and oftentimes prevents them from achieving educational success (Bednasek & Godlewska, 2009; Kanu, 2006, 2011; Battiste, 2013; Bissell & Korteweg, 2016). We therefore need to cultivate new teachers who



are prepared to teach about Indigenous peoples in a balanced, brave, and well-considered way, and who understand the need to include Indigenous content and pedagogies in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous classrooms. Learning opportunities focus on thinking critically about the curriculum and find ways to appropriately and deliberately include Indigenous perspectives and pedagogies in all subjects, across all grades. Given that they have an understanding of Indigenous diversity, students must also have the ability to incorporate locally appropriate resources, as well as resources that pass their appreciation of this diversity on to their students. Since our teacher candidates go on to seek careers across Turtle Island and indeed around the world, they must be equipped with skills to find and vet representative resources.

“Doing” involves modelling. To demonstrate various ways to Indigenize the classroom, we consciously name and employ Indigenous pedagogies in our classes. We also engage in metacognition about our teaching with them, explaining why we teach as we do, and why we include the content we do. For example, after discussing holistic learning with our students, we have an Indigenous arts workshop where we explore with them how traditional arts can be used to meet curriculum expectations in all subject areas, and we encourage them to think of additional applications for the activities. We teach outside as much as possible, and we require assignments and class-based work where students can explore how to engage their various teachable subjects or preferred grade levels in land-based learning. We provide the students with good resources and the tools to find their own resources, and we show a willingness to learn with them. Finally, we let them lead. Our students are often distressed by the lack of Indigenous knowledge in some of their peers in other classes. In response, we encourage them to create professional development opportunities for their peers to spread their knowledge. Our students’ willingness to make the effort to address knowledge gaps has resulted in numerous after-hours student-led events, including film screenings, Sisters in Spirit vigils and displays, question and answer sessions, Kairos blanket exercises, Orange Shirt Day activities, and the cultivation of a medicine garden on-campus along with displays about Indigenous medicines. These activities show students that they can be effective change agents, and they give students the confidence to effectively Indigenize their classrooms.

With respect to the Grandfather Teaching of honesty, taking action requires our students to be honest about what they know and do not know, and to be willing to take in new content and perspectives. In their future classrooms, our students’ actions in terms of

the content they choose to teach and how they teach it, will also reflect honesty. Honesty includes candid discussions about the fear of making a mistake, and how to address that fear. Being genuine as an educator means acknowledging that we do not always have all the answers. It is important for our students to understand that teachers are also learners, and engaging in life-long learning is expected and valued. Transparency includes talking about our own perspectives and how they have changed over time with new learning. It is our expectation that, instead of perpetuating Eurocentric perspectives on Canadian history and current realities that are prevalent in the curriculum (Godlewska et al., 2010), our students will be honest and well-rounded in what and how they teach. Their students will not arrive at post-secondary education with the same knowledge gaps that they suffered from in their own educational experiences.

### **The West: Honouring and Respect**

Coming full circle, we end in the west, where we examine the spiritual aspect of teacher education. While our courses involve Indigenous spirituality and ceremony, we never oblige anyone to participate in this aspect of our teaching; rather, by “honouring” we examine how our teacher candidates can show respect for Indigenous peoples and be agents of reconciliation by knowing about, understanding, and doing something about Indigenous concerns and societal injustices. In this way, the act of honouring is holistic; we take into account the realities of the past and present, but think about how we can move forward into a better future.

To accomplish this, we impress upon our students the sophistication of Indigenous knowledges and peoples. We also focus on Indigenous resilience. After centuries of abuse, genocide, and marginalization, Indigenous people endure. Indigenous ceremonies continue. Indigenous knowledges are increasingly celebrated in our own communities and in Western institutions. Certainly, the scars of past and current injustices mar Indigenous bodies and communities, but this is not a sign of weakness. On the contrary, the fact that Indigenous people stand strong and grow stronger today is a testament to lasting resilience, stunning persistence, and meaningful and ever-relevant cultural knowledge and wisdom. The curriculum we create for our students must honour that above all else. At the same time, we must bear testimony to and honour the fact that Indigenous students

inherit both resilience and trauma. As future teachers, our graduates must be prepared to interact with their own Indigenous students with both empathy and high expectations.

We are of the understanding that current Canadian society is unlikely to change in its composition, except in the addition of even more diversity to the population. Decolonizing society does not mean developing an expectation that European or any other immigrant cultures will cease to exist on these lands. Rather, it means coming to an understanding that diversity is a strength, but only when all communities regard one another with respect and in a spirit of equality. Within diversity, connections can be found. The Métis sash is a great exemplar for this lesson; the threads, woven together, are stronger than each single thread alone, and build beautiful fabric. Every thread matters, and the different colours make the final product all the more beautiful. Our students must understand that they are deeply connected to this land and to one another, and that they all have roles and responsibilities they must fulfil to create a fairer society. For those who carry socio-economic or racial privilege, that means acting in such a way that their own privilege may decrease as other peoples and perspectives achieve equity. It also means that our students must learn to relate to the land and other beings inhabiting it with respect, which includes fulfilling responsibilities to the place that sustains us in a reciprocal and sustainable way. These are lessons that can be learned through Indigenous teachings if our students have access to them and are willing to honour them.

To connect our students in a spirit of honouring, we strive to personalize their learning so that it is relevant to them, and continually encourage them to act in a way that promotes personal responsibility and a spirit of reconciliation and respect. For Indigenous educators, it is important to have the freedom to live our ceremonies and put our teachings into practice. We begin our classes with a smudge for all who wish to participate. We explain how to smudge their eyes so they see the best in their peers, their ears so they hear the truth in what others say, their mouths so they speak well, their minds so they think good thoughts, and their hearts so they carry good feelings as they move forward in their learning. We also talk about smudging and its implications for teachers. The sage we smudge with is a powerful medicine that we believe has an effect on one's mind, heart, body, and spirit. In addition, the act of smudging is an act of mindfulness. When we smudge ourselves, we remind ourselves of how we choose to act and interact with others. As such, we promise our students to listen to them with "smudge ears" and hear the best in what they are saying; when they ask questions that are based in limited knowledge, use

the wrong vocabulary, or negatively engage their privilege, we provide gentle correction and respond in a loving way. This ties into the Seven Grandfather Teachings: Love is at the heart of all we do and guides our way of being in the classroom.

After our students have spent eight months engaged in the study of Indigenous education, it is our expectation that they will take their learning forward wherever they choose to build their careers. As Dion (2009) points out, once a teacher has grown in their knowledge, understanding, and practice of Indigenous education, they can no longer act as a “perfect stranger” and replicate past injustices in the education system. Rather, the onus is on them to honour their knowledge by acting to improve the system, one classroom and school at a time. Thomas King words this expectation perfectly: “Take [it]. It’s yours. Do with it what you will... But don’t say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You’ve heard it now” (King, 2003, p. 60).

Our students’ path toward honouring is deeply tied to the Grandfather Teaching of respect. By moving away from the Eurocentric curriculum and engaging Indigenous content, perspectives, and pedagogies, our students show respect for Indigenous peoples and cultures as equally valid as Euro-Canadian peoples and cultures. Righting the balance translates as respect for Indigenous students, and speaking truth regarding the positive and negative aspects of Canadian history and current realities also shows respect for their non-Indigenous students. Sharing with students a more comprehensive view of their country and their relationship to its original inhabitants is far more respectful as it assumes that students can understand a nuanced perspective in place of the one-sided, nationalistic perspective that features in past and even current curriculum.

### **Building *Niwbaakaawin* and Telling *Debwewin***

Moving forward from the Medicine Wheel, we must also address the remaining Grandfather Teachings of *niwbaakaawin*, “wisdom,” and *debwewin*, “truth.”

## Calls to Action 10, 16, and 65

Call to Action 10 requires the training of teachers to teach Indigenous languages and Call to Action 16 calls on our institutions to offer degree and diploma programs in Indigenous languages. Call to Action 65 requires us to undertake research to advance reconciliation.

In all of these calls, we as teacher educators and researchers have a vital role to play. By engaging in research and then passing our research on to our students, and by preparing them to advance their own knowledge, we help to build societal wisdom, and we help our students to become not only more knowledgeable but also wiser. That wisdom will help them to become stronger change agents in their positions as teachers. We attempt this by discussing the concept of *nibwaakaawin* with our students, and comparing knowledge with wisdom. We have classroom conversations about how to develop and recognize wisdom. Coming full circle, the ability to speak wisdom on reconciliation translates as *debwewin*, “truth.” By engaging in research that builds our own wisdom and that of our students, we can work together to speak the truth as we know it about what reconciliation means, what it entails on a practical level, and how we can work together to move forward from our tragic shared history and the challenges of the present into a more respectful future. Exploring the concepts represented by the Medicine Wheel and the Seven Grandfather Teachings through the window of the Anishinaabemowin language, to the extent that we can, helps our students to understand the sophistication of the language and the concepts it expresses, and in this small way we honour Call to Action 10. We also encourage those students who have strong Indigenous language skills to share their knowledge with us and their peers to further enable us to meet this call.

Speaking *debwewin* also requires us to work closely with our institution. We must all build our own wisdom so that we can guide our institutions to work for meaningful change. While we do have work to do at Queen’s University, we currently have an administration that is committed to positive change and to responding to the *Calls to Action* (TRC, 2015a; Queen’s University, 2017). The response to Call to Action 16, which pertains to Indigenous language education, is emblematic of this. As of the fall 2017, Queen’s University began offering courses in Inuktitut, as well as in the Anishinaabemowin and Mohawk languages, since our institution stands on shared Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee territory. Historically, Anishinaabemowin has not been offered at this university. In the past few years, we have witnessed the building of institutional

*nibwaakaawin* through research by senior administrators and lobbying and awareness-raising by academic faculty and staff. Now, our university is coming to understand that to really honour Call to Action 16, it is vital to honour all the original inhabitants of this territory.

With respect to Call to Action 65, we see a greater emphasis on Indigenous research and an effort to welcome and promote more Indigenous scholars. In the balanced academy, where teaching and research are held to equal esteem, our research informs our teaching, and especially in a faculty such as education, our teaching informs our research. In order to meet any of the education-focused Calls to Action, and in our particular case to meet Queen's University's stated goal of incorporating Indigenous content into courses in all fields, we must also engage in research based in Indigenous knowledge. Failing to do so will result in a facile version of "Indigenization" that still perpetuates settler narratives and perspectives. That approach would fail to respect Indigenous peoples, philosophies, and structures, or question the existing philosophies and structures upon which the institution is based. Worse, it could result in a situation of "interest convergence" in which Indigenous concerns are ignored because others within the institution believe that truth has been told and reconciliation has been achieved. Meaningful reconciliation needs to be guided by Indigenous concepts, including the rooting of research in the search to develop *nibwaakawin* and tell *debwewin*. Given the serious under-representation of Indigenous academics and leaders in Western academia, the solution must be sought collaboratively, rather than assuming Indigenous people will carry the full burden to guide and manage the process of education and reconciliation and engage in appropriate research and teaching to see it go forward in a meaningful way. Again, it is important that allies be invited to serve, support, and collaborate on further Indigenous interests and perspectives, rather than assuming primary leadership in this work.

### **Conclusion: From *Niinwi* and *Kiinwa* to *Kiinwi***

In its essence, reconciliation is the process of moving from *niinwi* and *kiinwa* to *kiinwi*. Such a reorienting shift requires the growth of knowledge, understanding, action, and honouring of Indigenous peoples, cultures, and knowledges, and their ways of expressing these. This shift must occur on an individual level, with capacity building in both Indigenous and

non-Indigenous educators and individuals. The classroom is a microcosm and demonstrates that ally-building on an individual level leads to classroom community-building and the development of respectful, reciprocal relationships. In the university and wider society, change on an individual level can lead to institutional shifts. Once enough people understand the ethos of meaningful reconciliation, it can come to influence the actions of schools, universities, and larger society. That shift can only occur when allies, along with Indigenous people, understand why it is needed and insist that it take place.

Enacting meaningful change leading to reconciliation is no small challenge. Real reconciliation requires the relinquishing of historical racial and socio-economic privilege in order to build a fairer society. It requires members of the Euro-Canadian majority of society to step away from previously unexamined assumptions and incomplete understandings, and to face anger, guilt, and apathy within themselves and those around them. It requires all of us to live the Seven Grandfather Teachings, approaching one another with humility, honesty, and respect, and being brave enough to demand and endure change, even when personal sacrifice is required. The conviction that a fairer, more equitable society benefits the whole and ultimately lifts us all up is necessary to sustain us in the effort. Only then will we be able to build wisdom and speak truth in order to move toward meaningful reconciliation. All of this must be done with love. When our students enter our classroom, regardless of their heritage, we love them all and ensure they all know they belong with us. That beginning gives them the space to develop and practice love with one another and, eventually, their own students. In the end, love is the only thing that will drive reconciliation forward. It is a difficult and costly endeavor, both emotionally and financially; by our estimation, at least two thirds of the Calls to Action have direct financial implications for Canadian society, and all of them call for a reconsideration of existing educational, governance, and power structures. Fulfillment of the goals set out by the TRC will improve life for Canada as a whole and certainly for Indigenous peoples, but it would be disingenuous to claim that this can be done at no cost to Euro-Canadians. As we have seen in our institution, individual reconciliation, guided by Indigenous teachings and done in love, is the only thing that will result in systemic reconciliation. Teachers have a very important role in this process; they will guide the next generation, and have a tremendous impact on whether the exercise of reconciliation will be a success or a failure. Our role as teacher educators is therefore vital, as we need new teachers to leave our classrooms with the skills and desire to move from *niinwi* and *kiinwa* to *kiinwi*.

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