

Onkwehón:we Spirituality and the Reconciliatory Journey in Canadian Education

Frank Deer

Volume 47, Number 3, Fall 2024

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1114429ar>
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53967/cje-rce.6855>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Society for the Study of Education

ISSN

0380-2361 (print)

1918-5979 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Deer, F. (2024). Onkwehón:we Spirituality and the Reconciliatory Journey in Canadian Education. *Canadian Journal of Education / Revue canadienne de l'éducation*, 47(3), 591–606. <https://doi.org/10.53967/cje-rce.6855>

Article abstract

In recent decades, Onkwehón:we (Indigenous) education has been a burgeoning area of study and practice in primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools in Canada. One of the more significant contributions to this growth in recent years has been the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and its 94 Calls to Action. Central to the journey of reconciliation is understanding of the experiences of Onkwehón:we people and their perspectives on various things. Given that spirituality and associated ceremonial observances are important to many Onkwehón:we communities and have been explored in a number of schools and universities, their inclusion in academic and non-academic school programming merits exploration. This essay explores the importance of Onkwehón:we spirituality, its role in the reconciliatory journey, and the value of enabling schools to partner with Indigenous peoples to aid in its dissemination.



Onkwehón:we Spirituality and the Reconciliatory Journey in Canadian Education

Frank Deer

University of Manitoba

Abstract

In recent decades, Onkwehón:we (Indigenous) education has been a burgeoning area of study and practice in primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools in Canada. One of the more significant contributions to this growth in recent years has been the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and its 94 Calls to Action. Central to the journey of reconciliation is understanding of the experiences of Onkwehón:we people and their perspectives on various things. Given that spirituality and associated ceremonial observances are important to many Onkwehón:we communities and have been explored in a number of schools and universities, their inclusion in academic and non-academic school programming merits exploration. This essay explores the importance of Onkwehón:we spirituality, its role in the reconciliatory journey, and the value of enabling schools to partner with Indigenous peoples to aid in its dissemination.

Keywords: Indigenous, spirituality, religion, education, schools

Résumé

Au cours des dernières décennies, l'éducation Onkwehón:we (autochtone) est un domaine d'études et de pratique qui a connu un essor important dans les écoles primaires, secondaires et postsecondaires au Canada. Les conclusions de la Commission de vérité et de réconciliation du Canada ainsi que ses 94 appels à l'action s'avèrent l'une des contributions les plus déterminantes à cette croissance au cours des dernières années. Au cœur du processus de réconciliation se trouve la compréhension des expériences des Onkwehón:we et de leurs perceptions dans différents domaines. Puisque la spiritualité et les cérémonies qui y sont associées sont importantes pour de nombreuses communautés Onkwehón:we, et que certaines écoles et universités s'y intéressent, leur inclusion dans des programmes scolaires et non scolaires mérite d'être examinée. Cet essai explore l'importance de la spiritualité Onkwehón:we, son rôle dans le processus de réconciliation et l'intérêt de permettre aux écoles de collaborer avec les peuples autochtones pour faciliter cet apprentissage.

Mots-clés: autochtones; éducation, spiritualité, communauté, curriculum

Introduction

The concept of *reconciliation* as a frequently discussed topic in primary and secondary education emerges from a reckoning with the traumatic experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada, which have included subjugation, attempts of forced assimilation, colonial violence of various sorts, and genocide. Reconciliation is sometimes regarded as the journey toward the development of new relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples while maintaining an understanding of how past events have adversely affected these relationships—a conceptualization that is considered controversial for some but was that of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). Although the idea of reconciliation as social repair itself has a history globally, the features of reconciliation vis-à-vis the TRC relate to the specific experiences of those affected by these histories and the Calls to Action of the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Despite the broadly accepted and indisputable ways how primary and secondary education were managed by government and religious authorities for much

of the last 200 years, reconciliation in the post-TRC era has extended beyond schooling issues to address many areas of endeavour in Canadian society, such as public service (Frideres, 2011). Topics such as health and wellness, language and culture, and labour market participation are captured in the TRC Calls to Action. These calls have broadened the discussion of how relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples may be improved (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Reconciliation has since become a primary concern in most educational settings. With a view to the work of reconciliation through schools, this essay explores Onkwehón:we spirituality as a necessary component in the conversations on education for reconciliation in Canada.

In this essay, the term “Onkwehón:we,” from the Kanien’kehá (Mohawk) language, is used to refer to native people and is understood to mean “the original people.” In this essay, this term will be used interchangeably with the term “Indigenous.” Both terms will be used to refer to the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples of Canada and related territories.

Education for Reconciliation

Discussions regarding the reconciliatory journey, including its conceptualization and scope, are still developing in Canada. The majority of the Calls to Action that emerged from the TRC were explicitly intended for federal and provincial/territorial levels of government but are extending to other areas of societal endeavour. In addition to government offices, other institutions such as universities and colleges, religious organizations, and public offices are mentioned; however, the Calls to Action are primarily focused on the two main levels of government and point to a sort of responsibility that is imagined to be most applicable within Canada. As the TRC report states, “it will take sustained political will at all levels of government and concerted material resources” in order to realize progress (TRC, 2015, p. 4). The responsibilities of the various levels of government regarding these Calls to Action may be understood in the contexts of not only their past roles in the establishment and management of those schools that stole children from their families and communities for nefarious purposes, but also their current responsibilities regarding treaty and constitutional relationships. Regarding responsibilities that are particularly proximate to Onkwehón:we communities across the territories, these responsibilities include, among other things, the duty to deliver and administer important

social welfare amenities such as those associated with health and social services. Therefore, these areas of government and their respective responsibilities have been (at various levels of quality and engagement) involved in discussions on reconciliation in numerous events, initiatives, and other activities that are, ostensibly, in the public interest (Chandler-Olcott & Hinchman, 2018).

While the majority of the TRC Calls to Action demand potential actions or firm purposes of amendment toward provincial and federal levels of government (and there have been some encouraging moves emerging from those levels of government), many non-governmental institutions and community representatives (e.g., academic funding bodies, Christian authorities, and some areas of private industry) have exhibited some concern, interest, and commitment to the reconciliatory journey and its necessary processes of engagement and action. The responses from public institutions such as public education and community organizations have been rather interesting to observe. For example, I've been invited to present before the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce on the topic of reconciliation and have worked with private contractors on their bids for work in response to requests for proposals that include corporate commitments to reconciliation. These institutions have been taking part in discussions and initiatives that are intended to address the goals of reconciliation that aim to further develop relations with Onkwehón:we peoples whilst also coming to terms with terrible, even genocidal, histories. The general understanding of and discussion about reconciliation in Canada has extended beyond the interface of Onkwehón:we and government and has become inclusive of many for whom the Calls to Action were not primarily directed (Korteweg & Russell, 2012).

The general discussions of reconciliation—including those that have emerged from an exploration of Calls to Action 62 to 64, which are germane to potential educational change—have rightfully extended to people and communities involved in primary and secondary schooling (Deer, 2014). The histories, experiences, and perspectives of Onkwehón:we peoples have become very important when professionals—in collaboration with community members when possible—are working toward the creation of curriculum and non-curricular programming in schools. Many who either work or partner with schools have dedicated themselves to exploring Onkwehón:we experiences and issues of social or historical importance. In many schools, classroom programming for students includes important aspects of Onkwehón:we experiences, literacies, mathematics, and other areas of Onkwehón:we knowledge, including heritage, consciousness, and tradition.

Principals, consultants, and instructional leaders who have roles in developing programming and working with teachers to affect their work appropriately in the still-developing field of Indigenous education have become more receptive and responsive. The improved responsiveness of teachers and schools regarding reconciliation has begun to have a palpable impact upon what is taught: aspects of divergent Onkwehón:we experiences should be shared and honoured, and it should inform the development of a balanced perspective on Onkwehón:we experiences.

As positive as one may describe the reconciliation movement in primary and secondary education in Canada, including the movement toward integration of Onkwehón:we perspectives in curriculum, this work has not developed without criticism or difficult questions (Montero & Dénoimé-Welch, 2018). A great deal of criticism toward the reconciliation movement has manifested in some interesting public debate, with some presenting their positions through well-known media sources. For example, former residential school worker Rodney Clifton has argued that residential schools were not as bad as current dialogue suggests (e.g., Clifton, 2022). Also, some criticism has been reflected in professional and institutional resistance when critical political views have been taken up in reconciliation discourse (Grande, 2018). In the summer of 2024, I attended a national conference on political philosophy in which a well-known Canadian academic was a member of a panel titled “Identity Politics: Inclusion or Division.” In this panel, said academic regarded the reconciliation movement in education to be one of radical transformation and this notion was one of the fundamental reasons why many are resistant and why institutions are not responsive as they ought to be. This panelist’s observation was not surprising to me; many are rather wedded to their institutional frames and approaches.

Despite such challenges, many governmental and educational authorities have pressed forward with this new era in educational endeavour, one in which attempts are made to employ Onkwehón:we perspectives in appropriate ways through deliberate curricular change and community involvement. Thus, many in public education in Canada have taken up the responsibility of contributing to the development of appropriate curricular representations that will support a sustainable and educationally fruitful journey toward reconciliation. Many school leaders, including superintendents, principals, and instructional leaders, have ventured into this area in a manner that is inclusive of divergent Onkwehón:we perspectives, including the spiritual orientations of Onkwehón:we families

and communities. The approach of including the local and distinctive manifestations of Onkwehón:we knowledge has allowed many Onkwehón:we Elders and community members to contribute and even provide leadership and knowledge that is essential to this process. An example of this was reflected in one study by Deer and Heringer (2023):

Indigenous Elder participation in school activities contributed to the cultural capacity of schools and showed how traditional knowledge may be incorporated in curriculum and classroom activities. Schools that embrace such knowledge—which may help students to engage and experience IK, heritage, consciousness, and tradition—has become, amongst many, an important institutional goal. (p. 40)

The inclusion of Onkwehón:we community members into the conversations on how to address reconciliation has had a rather noticeable and important outcome. When Onkwehón:we community members (such as community Elders) are invited to share about Onkwehón:we knowledge and experiences, spirituality frequently becomes an essential part of the narrative. The response from many schools over time has been to include spiritual discussion and ceremonies in primary and secondary school settings—settings that have been, ostensibly, secular. Spirituality, the aspect of human experience that helps us explore, understand, and, at times, connect with each other, our world, and the observable universe, our individual and collective journeys toward moral truth, and to those things that are outside of our corporeal selves (Harris, 2014), is particularly important to Onkwehón:we experiences and it is this importance that has led to its consideration in contemporary school programming across Canada.

On Onkwehón:we Spirituality

It is no surprise to me that the inclusion and celebration of Onkwehón:we knowledges, heritage, and consciousness as important aspects of reconciliation in schools has come to include issues of community culture and spirituality. As intimated earlier, this has not occurred without difficulty given the sort of paradigm shift it represents. When a school district or school community deliberately interfaces in good faith with Onkwehón:we peoples for whom ontologies, epistemologies, and worldviews differ from those of non-Indigenous school authorities, the character of those perspectives can be quite a departure

from what has been customary in the school(s) in question. Although some schools and educators may not explicitly frame representations of Onkwehón:we as spiritual, many have begun exploring spiritual perspectives of their knowledge and consciousness in very clear and deliberate ways. Similar to how some schools have addressed the disciplinary areas of Onkwehón:we history and treaty education, the topic of spirituality has become a useful way to frame the nature of Onkwehón:we histories, experiences, and cultures. The inclusion of spiritual frames that reflect belief systems and worldviews of Onkwehón:we peoples (e.g., the seven sacred teachings) has begun to feature more frequently as schools endeavour to be involved with education for reconciliation and to engage in what is often referred to as “indigenization” (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). These initiatives have been represented by the emergence of such things as high school pow wows, the inclusion of Onkwehón:we Elders in school programming, and the development of curricula that incorporate activities such as sweat lodge ceremonies (Hamm, 2015). These movements of indigenization that bring in spiritual frames of reference might be curious to the non-Indigenous observer who reposes trust in the customary notion that public education is a secular endeavour. Perhaps this is why the framing of reconciliation is so important: the journey toward a new and appropriate relationship (one in which cross-cultural understanding is essential) is developed whilst maintaining a sense of shared histories. This cross-cultural understanding ought to include this important aspect of Onkwehón:we consciousness. To neglect this aspect would risk an incomplete understanding of Onkwehón:we experiences.

Why Do Spiritual Orientations Matter?

As Onkwehón:we spirituality has begun to feature in the learning activities of many schools across Canada, the significance of these spiritual orientations and their relevance to individually and communally held worldviews—worldviews that may inform their position in the reconciliation discussion—merits exploration. As mentioned earlier, recognizing the unique manifestations of Onkwehón:we knowledge, heritage, consciousness, and traditions is an essential aspect of the reconciliatory journey. This uniqueness is a central feature of Onkwehón:we beliefs and practices. Certain belief systems and their associated practices may be connected to specific Onkwehón:we communities and nations, although individuals may draw personal teachings and truths that distinctively condition their individual orientations. Spiritual orientations differ among Onkwehón:we communities

across Canada. However, there are some rather important similarities that also ought to be recognized. The names associated with a creator deity are one example. For instance, in my native language (Kanien'kehá), the word "Sonkwaia'tí:son" is used to refer to the traditional conception of the Creator. There are other ways of referring to a creator deity in Kanien'kehá and these different words are situated within different spiritual and religious stories—stories that affect the way worldviews are understood. Over time, the spiritual systems of belief—and the stories that store their teachings—provided me with a frame of sorts, through which my orientations toward such things as community, cross-cultural interface, and morality could be understood. The important point here is what those orientations represent. They are not mine alone, even though my individual orientations condition them; they are also a reflection of the community in which I was raised. To come to know me in the context of one who is Kanien'keháka from the community of Kahnawake is to come to know of these orientations.

Although this diversity of spiritual frames amongst Onkwehón:we communities is important to acknowledge, their similarities are noticeable. As Stonechild points out, "the underlying nature and principles of spirituality are the same" (2020, p. 24). Therefore, one may adduce palpable and representative commonalities as they relate to Onkwehón:we belief systems (for example, some of their central tenets that relate to ontology and epistemology), while at the same time focusing upon the unique context of individual nations. Understanding these commonalities and differences may be crucial to an appropriate understanding of specific Onkwehón:we communities and their beliefs.

As asserted earlier, spirituality helps us explore, understand, and, at times, connect with each other, our world and the observable universe, our individual and collective journeys toward moral truth, and to those things that are outside of our corporeal selves. This description of spirituality reflects an important notion that applies to spiritual and non-spiritual matters—that of *interrelation*. A commonality amongst Onkwehón:we across the territories and beyond that is worthy of mention in this discussion, is the recognition of an interrelatedness and interconnectedness of all things in life as a recurring theme. This interconnectedness may be understood as an internal feature of Onkwehón:we worldviews and may be similar to how non-Indigenous peoples approach their religious or spiritual journeys. The capacity to experience interconnection in a spiritual way may inform how an individual relates to others and substantiates the importance of the holistic Onkwehón:we lens and how it governs how one lives. As Archibald (2014)

intimated, the emotional, spiritual, physical, and mental realms do not exist or operate independently of one another, but instead are interconnected. Because of how these realms overlap with one another, it is sometimes said that it is difficult—even inappropriate—to consider their utility individually. The seven-generations principle that is held by many Onkwehón:we is also an outworking of this interrelatedness; that our actions have consequences and we must consider how our descendants are affected by our actions not just in the present but in the future. We are interrelated, therefore we bear responsibilities toward one another.

Essential to upholding interrelatedness is the notion that has perhaps been not as robust as it once was within the commons of social interface: responsibility. Deer and Heringer (2024) studied how Onkwehón:we Elders and Knowledge-Keepers apprehended their own moral journeys and those of others within their orbit. The stories that were heard in this study described important obligations and duties that were taken up by these Elders and Knowledge-Keepers. These commitments were acted upon within their communities with a view to help sustain their fellow community members and the sorts of Onkwehón:we knowledge that were so important to their cultural identities. As many of these participants lived and worked in their respective communities and were affiliated with universities, their responsibilities often involved protection—protection of Onkwehón:we knowledge, stories, and ceremonies, and the meaning that is stored in all of these things.

The Influence of Christian Belief

Christianity has a centuries-long legacy in Onkwehón:we communities across the territories. As such, there are many Onkwehón:we peoples who hold beliefs that fit a traditional spiritual frame and are informed by Christian orientations. My community roots may offer a good example of this. Although I learned some of the central tenets of what may be regarded as traditional Kanien'kehá:ka spirituality as a young child, I was also a baptized Catholic who was taught in school by a nun and did, in these formative years, develop within a belief system that was largely Christian in nature. This “bi-religious” upbringing had real consequences when it comes to the content of belief, and I would believe it wrong to regard this situation as one of religious synchronicity.

The influence of Christian views—especially those related to moral action and obedience to a creator deity—had such an influence upon my growth as a member of

a Kanienkeha'ka community, to the extent that I struggled to distinguish between my traditional orientations toward spirituality and those of the Christian faith and culture. The central tenets of Christian faith, such as those of the Decalogue, were a perennial aspect of educational and cultural discussion and concern and occurred concurrently with frequent and focused exploration of traditional practices such as those associated with Longhouse ceremonies and those of the Hatowi (a society of people who bore responsibility for certain medicinal practices). My aunt, who had a role in providing me with my Kanien'kehá name, was fluent in our language but was also a committed Christian. It is perhaps fortunate that in my community, both forms of faith were able to coexist even within individual families. Schools were supportive of this and employed teachers and community Knowledge-Keepers with expertise and experience to support learning in these areas. In conversation with other Onkwehón:we outside of the Rotinonshón:ni Confederacy, I've learned that in some communities such coexistence is not quite as forthcoming and the Christian faith is the prevailing orientation.

In Kahnawake, efforts to provide space for the exploration of the prevailing belief systems were made by schools and community members. These efforts were made because it was understood that these systems of belief oriented community members in terms of cultural identity and informed how they went about their lives. These efforts also brought Elders and Knowledge-Keepers into my life at a very early age. My experiences are one example of how spiritual orientations were present in my community and how schools supported their exploration and celebration. There is a diversity of belief and experience amongst the Onkwehón:we related to spirituality and religion that is too vast to cover in this essay. Some have a relatively well-codified set of spiritual principles that are stored and protected by groups such as Midewewin societies, whilst others are oriented toward less-defined yet heavily experiential practices (Friesen, 2000). Archibald (2014) reminds us that "each Aboriginal nation has particular traditions, protocols, and rules concerning stories and the way that stories are to be told for teaching and learning purposes" (p. 83), which must therefore be respected. The point that ought to be considered here is the manner in which spiritual belief features in Onkwehón:we consciousness and the journey to come to understand the spiritual orientations of specific Onkwehón:we communities and orientations.

Closing Thoughts: Exploring Onkwehón:we Spirituality in Schools

In this era of reconciliation, teachers and schools have begun to consider how Onkwehón:we perspectives related to spirituality and ceremony may be useful in supporting learning of the Onkwehón:we experience. As one who studies Indigenous education and supports pre-service teachers in schools, I have borne witness to many teachers including Onkwehón:we teachings (such as those of the Seven Sacred Teachings) in their classrooms. These teachings are believed to be traditional aspects of a moral framework espoused by, among others, the Anishinaabe peoples. Baskin et al. (2012) explained that the Seven Sacred Teachings may be understood as a framework that can support the necessary and deliberate exercise of “coming to know and trying to understand...[which] encompasses the overarching picture as we try to understand both the past and the present” (p. 194). Many schools that have explored Onkwehón:we perspectives in their programming are using these teachings in some manner, especially in primary schools. Efforts to explore their meaning and use in curricular terms and in school-based ceremonial exercises have become more frequent. When exploring the inter-personal opportunities that may be inherent in the use of the Seven Sacred Teachings, other frames for conditioning peer-to-peer interface are frequently cited, such as the Four R’s (respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991), which is done in an effort to normalize use of the teachings through an approach that supports social harmony.

Whilst growing up in my home community of Kahnawake, the older people—from whom students occasionally had the opportunity to learn—would explore spirituality and ceremony with a similar interpersonal frame that was not as formalized or delineated as the Four R’s but was still rather powerful. They appeared to operate from the position that righteousness and appropriate peer-to-peer interface were more of a contextual exploration where some teachings and moral imperatives were more important than others, depending on the situation. It may be understood as an approach in which certain moral precepts such as truth and courage may be prioritized depending on the context in which the individual finds themselves. In spite of this landscape, and the dynamic nature that might be present within it, the older people would be rather firm on a notion that may be stated like this: that truth should be understood as the highest human principle.

The Onkwehón:we teaching of truth, as explored earlier, bears some similarities to classical Western philosophical views on truth, belief formation, and justification. As one of the Seven Sacred Teachings, truth in this frame may be understood as a factual claim, as a claim that is true insofar as it fits within a system of other truths, or how it may be pragmatic to make a truth claim in certain situations (Blackburn, 2018). In an age of resurgence amongst the Onkwehón:we of these territories, I feel compelled to situate this understanding in terms that are aligned with our traditional understandings. In my language, the word “Orihwí:io” is used to communicate the term “truth.” However, this term may be understood as a way that departs from the conceptual representations of Blackburn cited above. In my language, this word has a sense of “goodness” situated within it. A relative of mine reminded me recently that the term Orihwí:io may be best understood to mean something like “a good matter.” I don’t believe this is a trivial observation, as this not only reflects a traditional view of this important term but also affects our understanding of the term and its use. There are similar issues of meaning resident in how the Anishinaabe and Cree peoples understand the term “truth” in their traditional languages and understandings. With an exploration of spiritual frames can come the opportunity to learn important aspects of the unique manifestations of Onkwehón:we knowledge, which are crucial to the reconciliatory process.

Given that the field of Indigenous education has become a burgeoning area of attention in primary and secondary education in Canada, the manner through which primary and secondary schools may engage in Onkwehón:we content in the various provincial jurisdictions may merit some brief exploration. Some jurisdictions have focused almost exclusively on how history and social studies may reflect Onkwehón:we perspectives. For example, the provincial social studies curriculum in the province of Manitoba explores the topic of “Aboriginal” spirituality and defines it thusly:

From an Aboriginal perspective, spirituality refers to a way of seeing the world as created by a principle that is ever present and always active. This perspective involves a total way of life and affirms balance and harmony with the land. The practices associated with this way of life create and maintain a sense of Aboriginal identity and membership within one’s family, community, and nation/people. These practices honour the traditions, customs, and symbols that Aboriginal people have inherited from their ancestors. (Province of Manitoba, 2003, p. 142).

A smaller number of schools have ventured to develop mathematics and science curricula with Onkwehón:we content and perspectives. Saskatchewan's science curriculum affirms regional views (e.g., the Cree peoples) of spirituality as an important aspect of Onkwehón:we knowledge. To situate Onkwehón:we spirituality for the benefit of science educators, their curriculum states that:

Traditional knowledge is a cumulative body of knowledge, know-how, practices and representations maintained and developed by peoples with extended histories of interaction with the natural environment. These sophisticated sets of understandings, interpretations and meanings are part and parcel of a cultural complex that encompasses language, naming and classification systems, resource use practices, ritual spirituality, and worldview. (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 14)

There are many different areas of scholastic concern that may be conducive to inclusion of Onkwehón:we perspectives. Yet there appears to be one topic that is (however intended or unintended) common across school initiatives in Canada—that of spirituality. There are not many observations or assumptions that need to be cited to make this claim somewhat robust. When called upon to speak about topics of Onkwehón:we history, treaty understanding, biology, and other areas of disciplinary concern, Onkwehón:we Elders, Knowledge-Keepers, and community members will frequently situate spiritual understandings through narrative discourse as a response. We are now at a time when there is less controversy in planning ceremonies and powwows in schools, as well as less resistance to the inclusion of Onkwehón:we Elders in school planning and learning.

There are now several different types of “sources” from which we may draw direction and even inspiration on how to enable spiritual exploration in our schools. In addition to the curricular sources of the sort that are cited above, as well as those community sources that inform extracurricular activities such as powwows, the aforementioned Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) final report and 94 Calls to Action have identified the need for improved school programming for Canadian children and youth. Calls such as those associated with “Education for Reconciliation” (Calls to Action 62 to 65) have been rightfully interpreted as requiring the support of the Onkwehón:we community—as the saying goes, “Nothing about us without us.” The inclusion of Onkwehón:we spiritual orientations into school programming requires the support of (and, where necessary, assent by) the Onkwehón:we from whom those orientations emanate.

The opportunities for schools to work closely with Onkwehón:we community members may yield the most widely observable episodes of celebration of the sort that would inspire much pride—ceremonies that are informed by the expertise of Onkwehón:we spiritual leaders such as community Knowledge-Keepers can be truly affirming and at times celebratory. As intimated earlier, these extracurricular events ought not be regarded as the only avenue through which such inclusion should occur. The examples from the curriculum of the two Canadian provinces cited above include elements of curricular mapping that can support teachings in their journey to integrate these elements into their academic programming. In some areas of the curriculum, such as mathematics and science, it may seem challenging to take this step. In some instances, explicit direction may not be forthcoming for whatever reason; a teacher of a subject at an applied level of study in high school (e.g., Grade 12 chemistry) may experience difficulty marshalling support and resources in their immediate spheres of work. In order to seriously address any part of the curriculum for which one is responsible to teach and integrate Onkwehón:we perspectives, one must also take the responsibility to discover and to continue to learn seriously. There is an emerging body of academic work and professional resources—including community-based resources such as Elders and Knowledge-Keepers—that are available to help educators and schools explore this issue. The work of Onkwehón:we scholars such as Cash Ahenakew, Blair Stonechild, and James Vukelich Kaagegaabaw provide valuable insight into the spiritual dimensions of Onkwehón:we knowledge, community culture, and worldviews. Support in this area is growing in Canada and the reconciliatory journey is all the better for it.

We have borne witness to increased and improved initiatives by many schools to include Onkwehón:we spirituality in their academic and non-academic programming. At times this has been down to the initiative of a small number of school staff, frequently with the support and encouragement of community members. In other instances, these activities are the result of school- or district-wide efforts (led or supported by school leadership) to incorporate aspects of their students' cultural identities. Changes of these sorts have not been easy and have required much effort and diplomacy. In spite of the challenges, the efforts of brave advocates for Onkwehón:we education have helped to create spaces in our schools for the exploration of such spiritual journeys. Although I've focused upon the spiritual orientations of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in this essay, the notion that spiritual and religious frames may positively affect all peoples' jour-

neys toward moral truth and well-being is one that schools should not suppress. Instead, we should be sharing in spaces of harmonious engagement. As discussed earlier, this is an essential part of the reconciliatory journey.

References

- Archibald, J. (2014). *Indigenous storywork: Educating the heart, mind, body, and spirit*. UBC Press.
- Baskin, C., McPherson, B., & Strike, C. (2012). Using the seven sacred teachings to improve services for Aboriginal mothers experiencing drug and alcohol misuse problems and involvement with child welfare. In D. Newhouse, K. Fitzmaurice, T. McGuire-Adams, & D. Jette (Eds.), *Well-being in the urban Aboriginal community: Fostering biimaadiziwin, a national research conference on urban Aboriginal Peoples* (pp. 179–201). Thompson Educational Publishing.
- Blackburn, S. (2018). *On truth*. Oxford University Press.
- Chandler-Olcott, K., & Hinchman, K. A. (2018). Reconciliation. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 62(2), 133–135. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.899>
- Clifton, R. (2022, September 5). *My life in two Indian residential schools*. C2C Journal. <https://c2cjournal.ca/2022/09/my-life-in-two-indian-residential-schools/>
- Deer, F. (2014). The institutional and community capacity for Aboriginal Education: A case study. *In Education*, 19(3), 3–16. <https://journals.uregina.ca/ineducation/article/view/137/619>
- Deer, F., & Heringer, R. (2023). Indigenous perspectives at the cultural interface: Exploring student achievement through school/community-based interventions. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 46(1), 33–55. <https://doi.org/10.53967/cje-rce.5707>
- Deer, F., & Heringer, R. (2024). Karihwaientáhkwén: Conceptualizing morality in Indigenous consciousness. *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education*, 19(1), 3–27. <https://doi.org/10.20355/jcie29603>
- Ellerby, J. (2006). *Working with Indigenous elders*. Aboriginal Issues Press.
- Frideres, J. S. (2011). *First Nations in the twenty-first century*. Oxford University Press.
- Friesen, J. (2000). *Aboriginal spirituality and biblical theology: Closer than you think*. Detselig.

- Gaudry, A., & Lorenz, D. (2018). Indigenization as inclusion, reconciliation, and decolonization: Navigating the different visions for indigenizing the Canadian academy. *AlterNative*, 14(3), 218–227. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180118785382>
- Grande, S. (2018). Refusing the university. In M. Spooner & J. McNinch (Eds.), *Dissident knowledge in higher education* (pp. 168–189). University of Regina Press.
- Hamm, C. (2015). Walking with place: Storying reconciliation pedagogies in early childhood education. *Journal of Childhood Studies*, 40(2), 56–66. <https://doi.org/10.18357/jcs.v40i2.15179>
- Harris, S. (2014). *Waking up: A guide to spirituality without religion*. Simon & Schuster.
- Kirkness, V. J., & Barnhardt, R. (1991). First Nations and higher education: The four R's – respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 30(3), 1–15. <https://www.uaf.edu/ankn/publications/collective-works-of-ray-b/Four-Rs-2nd-Ed.pdf>
- Korteweg, L., & Russell, C. (2012). Decolonizing + indigenizing = moving environmental education toward reconciliation. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 17, 5–14.
- Montero, M. K., & Dénommé-Welch, S. (2018). Reconciliation through education: A review of “Achieving Indigenous student success: A guide for secondary classrooms.” *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 62(2), 241–243. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26632926>
- Province of Manitoba. (2003). *Kindergarten to grade 8 social studies: Manitoba curriculum framework of outcomes*. <https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/socstud/framework/k-8framework.pdf>
- Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. (2009). *Saskatchewan curriculum: Science*. <https://curriculum.gov.sk.ca/CurriculumHome?id=61>
- Stonechild, B. (2020). *Loss of Indigenous Eden and the fall of spirituality*. University of Regina Press.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Truth and reconciliation commission of Canada: Calls to action*. McGill-Queen's University Press.