

## **CALLED TO ACTION: DIALOGUE AROUND PRAXIS FOR RECONCILIATION**

Jennifer MacDonald and Jennifer Markides

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### Article abstract

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# CALLED TO ACTION: DIALOGUE AROUND PRAXIS FOR RECONCILIATION

JENNIFER MACDONALD & JENNIFER MARKIDES *University of Calgary*

**ABSTRACT.** Education for reconciliation is centered on renewing Indigenous-settler relations. In this article, two graduate students share their experiences as they endeavour to take up a praxis for reconciliation. Positioned by their different cultural identities, they join in a duoethnographic conversation, to reflect on their learning and to share their successes, insights, and tensions as they navigate various complexities. Through their reflective process, they ask: *What might collective enactment look like and what forms might it take in education?* As they journey together, they discuss the need for spaces that promote vulnerability and openness, and the strength of land-based and grassroots learning opportunities.

## APPEL À L'ACTION: DIALOGUE SUR UNE DÉMARCHE DE RÉCONCILIATION

**RÉSUMÉ.** L'éducation ayant pour but la réconciliation vise à renouveler les relations entre Autochtones et pionniers. Dans cet article, deux étudiantes à la maîtrise font part des expériences vécues au sein d'une démarche de réconciliation. Influencées par leur identité culturelle différente, elles participent à une discussion duo-ethnographique pour réfléchir à leurs apprentissages. Elles partagent leurs succès, observations et tensions au long de ce parcours parsemé d'embûches. Au cours de leur processus de réflexion, elles s'interrogent : « À quoi une démarche collective pourrait-elle ressembler et quelles formes pourrait-elle prendre dans le domaine de l'éducation ? » En pleine démarche, les étudiantes abordent le besoin de lieux pour promouvoir la vulnérabilité et l'ouverture d'esprit, ainsi que le potentiel des opportunités d'apprentissage plus populaires et sur le terrain.

We met in the fall of 2015 as we were beginning our doctoral programs in education. By chance, we happened to sit beside each other on the first day and then subsequently shared all the same classes. Finding ourselves in continuous conversation around topics of the natural environment, culture,

teaching and learning, and wellbeing, we circled matters of truth and reconciliation — seeing ourselves as part of the process and sharing our experiences and insights — from two different cultural and geographic perspectives.

## FROM SELF-SITUATING TO SHARED PRAXIS

*MacDonald:* I grew up in the small city in Eastern Ontario. I am a settler Canadian, of Scottish and British descent. My identity has also been shaped by my work as an outdoor environmental educator and spending time with the rivers, lakes, mountains, and trees. I have also worked as a physical education and humanities teacher in secondary school settings for nearly a decade, and now in undergraduate teacher-education courses.

*Markides:* I am a member of the Métis Nation and resident of High River, Alberta. I have Swampy Cree, British, Swedish, Irish, Coast Salish, Belgian, and Scottish ancestry. My hometown of Smithers, B.C., is situated in the beautiful Bulkley Valley — where the Bulkley River borders the traditional territories of the Wet'suwet'en and Gitksan Peoples. Additionally, I have worked as a teacher for nearly 15 years — first, in elementary Montessori, and now in undergraduate teacher-education classes.

## WHERE DID OUR RESEARCH JOURNEY WITH TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION BEGIN?

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC, 2015a) Final Report states, "all Canadians have a critical role to play in advancing reconciliation in ways that honour and revitalize the nation-to-nation Treaty relationships" (p. 237). We saw the Calls to Action (TRC, 2015b) as a starting place to explore *our role* in moving reconciliation forward. We made a commitment to read the 94 Calls to Action together. We asked: *Who is being called to action?* And, *what might they be called to do?* While much of the document called upon different levels of government and organizations to make change, we could also see entry points for the individual. We found that the role of the individual needed to be effortful and sought out, to hold the government and organizations accountable while actively fostering ethical relationships. We drew on our own experiences to situate our understandings, which in turn positioned us in a complex relationship with reconciliation. From this initial reading, we saw the importance and imperative of carrying our work forward in our lives and in our work as educators. *How do we support reconciliatory relationships and learning for reconciliation?*

To do this, we found further opportunities to engage with reconciliation as a form of praxis — using "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 51). We were not totally sure how to do this at first, but felt a shared commitment to bring the Calls to Action document to life in our daily experiences. We participated in graduate courses with

Indigenous foci — an Indigenous research methodology course and a land-based teaching and learning course around four directions teachings. We became involved in community initiatives, facilitated workshops around opening safe spaces and learning conversations, and participated in ceremony. Our circles continued to expand while the pervasive complexities, emotion, and hope of this work were constantly revealed and felt. Having each other for support was invaluable. We felt our pause for reflection honoured ongoing efforts to “encourage and engage in respectful dialogue on many issues that hinder or foster reconciliation” (TRC, 2015a, p. 39).

We continue our conversation together, asking: *What successes, insights, and tensions exist in our praxis? What might collective enactment look like and what forms might it take in education?* In what follows, we position ourselves in education for reconciliation, discuss how duoethnography (Norris & Sawyer, 2012) fits with our intentions, share our reflective dialogue, discuss emergent themes, and conclude with a discussion of what next. From our ongoing learning, we recognize the vulnerability needed to address complexities and to engage authentically, and we wish to honour the slowness embedded in a thoughtful process. We share our conversation as an invitation for others to reflect on their own beliefs, biases, and understandings. We also hope to inspire other students and educators to participate in dialogue that will bring meaning to their own contexts.

## WHAT IS RECONCILIATION?

Wikipedia (n.d.) describes reconciliation as “the restoration of friendly relations,” “the action of making one view or belief compatible with another,” or “the action of making financial accounts consistent; harmonization” (“Reconciliation”). To problematize the taken-for-granted definitions with a view toward reconciliatory education, we ask: *have the relations ever been truly friendly, such that they can be “restored” to a previous desired state? How can we make “worldviews” compatible? Is there still an urgent need to harmonize the financial accounts at the federal and provincial levels to ensure equitable funding for Indigenous education, language programs, community services, and more?* From the TRC’s Final Report (2015a):

The Commission defines reconciliation as an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships. A critical part of this process involves repairing damaged trust by making apologies, providing individual and collective reparations, and following through with concrete actions that demonstrate real societal change. (p. 16)

As we take up this work, we are mindful of the multiple definitions, interpretations, and implications. We bring a respect for the truths shared and a commitment to the actions needed for reconciliation to make the much-needed changes in our world. We agree that “The urgent need for reconciliation runs deep in Canada. Expanding public dialogue and action on reconciliation be-

yond residential schools will be critical in the coming years. Although some progress has been made, significant barriers to reconciliation remain” (TRC, 2015a, p. 7). The need for reconciliation pre-dates the TRC’s inception and the legacies of colonization will be part of our Canadian identity forever. It is what we do with the notion of reconciliation that stands to make a difference in the stories we tell and the lives we touch, shaping our relationships for the better.

### *Towards education for reconciliation*

Canadians must do more than just talk about reconciliation; we must learn how to practise reconciliation in our everyday lives – within ourselves and our families, and in our communities, governments, places of worship, schools, and workplaces. (TRC, 2015a, p. 20)

Education is a central theme in the TRC’s mandate. As both of us study and work in a university setting, and have backgrounds in educational contexts, we are drawn to consider our life experiences and how the intent of the document will live in our classrooms, educational research, and personal lives. We see thoughtful responses being taken up, such as Butler, Ng-A-Fook, Vaudrin-Charette, and McFadden’s (2015) examination of their practices as researchers and settler educators, and Bissell and Korteweg’s (2016) two-fold digital narrative project focused on relationship building with settler teacher candidates and Indigenous students. In wider settings, ministries of education and educational institutions have written and committed to mandates emphasizing Indigenous education (for example see Alberta Education, 2016; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016; University of Calgary, 2017). Many of the initiatives prompted by the Calls to Action are recent; therefore, the success of these efforts has yet to be realized.

In scholarly communities, we notice the intertwined narratives around: Indigenous education, decolonizing education, and education for reconciliation. While we see similar purposes in these forms of education, we note the subtle differences. Indigenous education works to honour culturally-informed practices, languages, and traditions (Battiste & Barman, 1995; Cajete, 1994). While many of these traditions were subject to attempted assimilation and obliteration by the church and state (Milloy, 1999), contemporary contexts of Indigenous education promote healing, reclamation, and resurgence (Denis, 2007; Simpson, 2011). Decolonizing education (Battiste, 1998; Haig-Brown, 2009) problematizes the explicit and hidden normalization of Eurocentric colonialism in the education system and works towards socially-just curriculum and practices. That said, we understand the overarching purpose of education for reconciliation to be centered on healing and renewing the Indigenous-Settler relationship (Cannon, 2012; TRC, 2015a). We see shifting discourse towards education for reconciliation visible in the fields of environmental education (Korteweg & Russell, 2012) and social science education (Hildebrandt et al. 2016; Tupper, 2014), where we find progressive conversations around the

importance of land, place, and treaties. Our review of the literature, however, suggests that little has been written about the experience and complexities of renewing relationships from a student or teacher perspective.

Regan (2010) argued that there is great pedagogical possibility for disrupting narratives and renewing relations at this time, and emphasized the importance of unsettling ourselves as part of the collective project. In her words, “Unsettling the settler within necessarily involves critical self-reflection and action in our lives – a difficult learning that is part of the struggle we must undertake” (p. 237). We, too, see the importance of questioning our lived-experiences and exposing our vulnerability. In addition, we appreciate the narratives of educating the heart, and see the work of reconciliation as a project of being human – validating emotions and spirit as part of knowing. Regan (2010) said, “Connecting head, heart, and spirit in ways that value vulnerability and humility enables us to accept harsh truths and to use our moral imagination in order to reclaim our own humanity” (p. 237). Through collaboration, we hope to privilege work from the heart and contribute to wider conversations of renewing relationships and honouring complexities towards education for reconciliation.

#### **METHODOLOGY: DUOETHNOGRAPHY AS A RECONCILIATORY MOVE**

*Duoethnographies inspire compassion and a sense of humanity as they call us to action.*  
(Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 11)

*Reconciliation is about stories and our ability to tell stories. I think the intellectual part of ourselves wants to start looking for words to define reconciliation. And then there is the heart knowledge that comes from our life experiences.*  
(Lorena Fontaine, cited in TRC, 2015a, p. 293)

To guide our narrative process, we employed tenets of duoethnography that capture the multifaceted layers of our past, present, and future experiences. Duoethnography, as described by Norris and Sawyer (2012), is a “participatory, dialogic, and non-prescriptive” (p. 12) manner of conducting research. Given our inclination to share stories from our lived-curricula in a fluid manner, the method fit well with our already established *modus operandi*. Our conversations engage elements of *currere*, dialogue, difference, and reflexivity (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). We situate ourselves as the research sites, while unpacking and repacking meaning together. Positioned differently, our exchanges expose the complexities of our disparate perspectives and enable us to disrupt and displace the dominant stories that we hold, and that hold us – as a collective act of resistance and hope.

On a wider scale, we consider duoethnography to be an appropriate move

towards a reconciliatory practice. Although this method sits within a Western epistemology and carries the inherent limitations of Eurocentric research, we appreciate: the space for conversation, the move away from making fixed claims, and the purposeful unsettling of taken-for-granted opinions. As Sawyer and Liggett (2012) explained, “the goal is to surface, critique, and reconceptualize our perceptions” (p. 630) of the phenomenon being considered through the process. Regan (2010) stressed the importance of both interpersonal and intrapersonal work for transformation to occur. This method allows us to work together, to interrogate ourselves, and form collective understandings. As personal transformations take place and questions about wider cultural narratives surface, the conversations require us to be vulnerable, while building trust and respect. Ultimately, a deeper relationship is formed.

## ENGAGING IN MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE

Using duoethnographic conversations as a space to “interrogate and reinscribe [our] previously held beliefs” (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 9), we invite readers to consider their own positions and convictions as we engage in dialogue around our own contexts. We enter into discussion by first questioning our conceptualization of self in view of reconciliatory reawakening, as a means to orient ourselves to the topic. In doing so, we revisit personal experiences and re-conceptualize ourselves through the duoethnographic process. Next, we explore the ways we are embodying and enacting *conceptions of reconciliation*. Finally, we re-interpret our understandings of *reconciliatory praxis*: from deep reflection to conscientious action. While this journey is deeply personal, we also believe that the dialogic process invites the reader to reflect and connect to reconciliation through our stories, with and against their own experiences. Answering the Calls to Action, we recognize that:

Reconciliation must become a way of life. It will take many years to repair damaged trust and relationships in Aboriginal communities and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Reconciliation not only requires apologies, reparations, the relearning of Canada’s national history, and public commemoration, but also needs real social, political, and economic change. (TRC, 2015a, p. 238)

We expose the messiness of the learning as a reality of our process and hope to inspire others to become involved. We aspire to be part of that change, through reflective words and thoughtful actions.

### *Conceptualization of self in view of reconciliatory reawakening*

*Markides*: The concept of *reawakening* is common in reconciliation discourse, similar to Leanne Simpson’s (2011) use of *resurgence* — requiring political atonement for loss of land, language, culture, and self-governance. This terminology of reawakening and resurgence signals the need to *reclaim* what has been lost,

stolen, forbidden, omitted, marginalized, and/or prohibited. Maracle (1996) named education as a racist institution, privileging white culture while annihilating others. In her words, “The expropriation of the accumulated knowledge of Native peoples is one legacy of colonization. Decolonization will require the repatriation and the rematriation of that knowledge by Native people themselves” (p. 92). I find this daunting; some knowledges will have been lost forever. Colonizers have worked for hundreds of years to quash cultures, languages, traditions, beliefs, peoples, and more. In a CBC Massey Lecture, Wade Davis (2009) described the rapid loss of languages worldwide. Language holds the nuances and history of a people’s culture. Sylvia McAdams (2015) listed language, land, and culture as pivotal to maintaining nationhood. Like many of the Calls to Action, the revitalization of language and culture (and potentially nationhood) appear impossible for just one person. So how do we, as individuals, conceptualize and enact reconciliation?

*MacDonald:* In you saying, “impossible for just one person,” I realize that my own process has been heavily focused on interrogating my understandings, my responsibilities and my work. It is essential for me to remember that renewing relationships involves being part of a community, which is a complex matter in and of itself. How do I move past the self-doubt? How do I move past the politics? I come to this dialogue with an open heart and an open mind, and willingness to work through difficult issues. Despite my best intentions, I continuously worry that I may not completely understand the privileges that I grew up with and how they continue to work on me. I believe it is in a space of vulnerability and sharing that reconciliation work can best occur. I see our research, classes, and the various initiatives with Indigenous topics to be a gift. I am not embellishing when I say they are changing my life and how I conceive myself in relation to the world. The idea of renewing relationships and reawakening the spirit that Elder Bob Cardinal of the Enoch Cree Nation (personal communication, February 4, 2017) shares with us, resonates with me. My engagement with his teachings is providing a more fulsome understanding of how truth and reconciliation is not just about the relations between people, but equally about our relations with more-than-human co-inhabitants. As I read through the TRC (2015a) Final Report, this relation to land comes up as common theme as a crucial part of the process: “If human beings resolve problems between themselves but continue to destroy the natural world, then reconciliation remains incomplete” (p. 18). This statement is an imperative consideration for my work as an outdoor educator.

*Markides:* Yes, I agree with the need to foster all manner of relationships. We benefit from opportunities to find and build community in life and learning. When I travelled to the Rising Up: Indigenous Graduate Student Conference in Winnipeg, I was heartened by the strength and comradery I experienced as part of the presenter group. Indigenous and non-Indigenous presenters shared their research on a variety of subjects, including Tahltan language nests (Mor-



ris, 2017), the role of Elders working within correctional institutes (Quantick, 2017), and the recognition and traditions surrounding two-spirit people in Indigenous communities across North America (Pruden, 2017). Similarly, we have felt a closeness to the people we have met through our Indigenous coursework. In these communities, I see reclamation and reconciliation being enacted — *becoming possible*. I know that not everyone agrees that these types of conferences, classes, or research endeavours should involve both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants. My belief is that we need everyone to be involved if we want to see real change in our systems and our society. Since the conference, I learned that a second Indigenous graduate student conference took place concurrently in Winnipeg, but that the other conference was not open to non-Indigenous participants. I have been dwelling on this with feelings of unease and tension — asking: *whose voices should be heard / privileged? What is afforded / occluded by exclusivity? What is afforded / occluded by inclusivity? And, why do I feel so strongly about it?*

*MacDonald:* Your questions have me reflecting on how the meanings of reconciliation might differ depending on one's position and community, and where one might be on their own path. These topics are shrouded in depth and complexity. For me, my path comes with honouring feelings of unease and tension about being a settler, while also wanting to learn more about Indigenous ways. For too long, I have been stuck here. It seems I have the repetitive conversations with myself — I want to move past critique to move forward in a good way, but lack the insight around how to do this respectfully. At the same time, I know dwelling in critique is part of a decolonizing process. I just had the same sinking feeling with your conference experience in Winnipeg. In my mind, it is an ideal model of coming together and I feel encouraged that these events can be successful. However, I also understand that tensions run deep and different communities are at different places on their own journeys of healing and understanding. With this, I can see the need and desire to have a conference closed to non-Indigenous people. I detect that Indigenous peoples need space to explore their cultures, languages, traditions, and beliefs, etc., to strengthen their voice on their own terms. The right to do this, after all, has been hidden and forbidden for centuries. With that, I see resurgence and reconciliation as two different concepts. The former needing to find ground before the latter can be possible. I also think about reconciliation in my own community, and recognize that work is needed to dispel stereotypes and the workings of racism to educate both sides, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, before a rising together might be a possibility. I see layers of misunderstandings, and without any mediation of viewpoints from both sides, reconciliation will never be possible.

*Markides:* The disquiet of these relationships can be both perplexing and

forbidding. You have given me much to think about, as I continue to dwell on my unrest with the exclusive conference. First, I think it is inevitable that people will work collaboratively in their own circles to reconnect with each other, traditions, languages, ceremonies, and teachings, so long as they are not oppressed or persecuted for doing so. I think my uneasiness comes from my own experience of feeling *not Indigenous enough*, and wondering, *would I be welcomed at that conference or turned away?* In my youth, I struggled with tensions of *knowing* of my Indigenous heritage, but not being able to learn about it or talk about it – a long-term result of colonization. My family members knew and/or believed that it was better for us not to know about our Indigenous ways and tried to distance us – their children and grandchildren – from the stigma of *being Native*. This affected my relationship with so many family members – grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. I grew up knowing shame of ancestry, but not understanding it; *why should I be ashamed?* The unfortunate reality was that a lot of the racism and discrimination came from our own communities; non-Indigenous and Indigenous people perpetuating the blood quantum scrutiny imposed through the Indian Act of 1876 – *conquered and divided, divided and conquered*. My blood boils when I think of what has been lost in my family alone. Then I think of the losses experienced by all Indigenous peoples and I am enraged. The problem I have with an exclusive conference for Indigenous people is that it promotes the colonial gatekeeping that has got us into so many of the problems we have today. My family story is not unique. I have heard stories from people raised on reserves but not taught their language or traditions, children removed from their communities who are adopted and raised by non-Indigenous families, and countless other examples of people not believing they had a right to claim their Indigeneity. *Who will be counted as Indigenous enough?*

*MacDonald:* I appreciate you sharing more openly your concerns with the exclusive Indigenous conference. Given your family experiences, I see how this exclusivity may have caused, and re-surfaced, confusion and unease. From my position, if Indigenous people desire a conference to celebrate culturally relevant issues or to discuss experiences of oppression, I cannot argue but give space until they are ready for me to join the circle. Until then, I will seek out opportunities with others who may be at a different place on the path of healing and understanding. This year, being a part of the course “Holistic Approaches to Life and Living” with Dr. Dwayne Donald, Dr. Christine Stewart, and Elder Bob Cardinal, I was inspired by the welcoming atmosphere and teachings focused on good relations. The teachings are for everyone, stories do not take sides, and I feel part of something special – an exemplar for what reconciliation should look like. With every class meeting I feel more connected. Like you, I thrive in the ideals of this type of non-exclusive environment and want to surround myself in all that gives life to this. My desire is that our collective *circle* will continue to expand. However, our conversation here brings back my unease.

I want to honour the space and time of others, educate about the difficult truths, and establish meaningful relationships. Each of these roles is fraught with layers of complexity. I feel I always need to walk a careful line. From my experiences in different Canadian communities, it seems that assumptions and biases continue to hinder the ability to form meaningful relationships with Indigenous people. Therefore, I do not see cultural understandings and relations at a level close to reconciliation, but I am lost at knowing how to address this. I worry about disclosing the common narrative I continue to hear in my communities — afraid that I will offend, cause disruption, or perpetuate the narrative I want to overcome. At the same time, opportunities to talk openly with others, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, have helped expand my understanding that *I am a visitor* on these lands. In addition, our process here makes me more aware that people of settler descent, too, have been subjected to the workings of colonialism. For example, throughout my schooling, I approached learning in linear ways and this seeped into the methods of my early teaching practices. Likewise, my daily urban life brings me into contact with consumer ideologies. Unlearning these ways needs to be part of the settler journey. More balance is needed. With this sentiment, perhaps we should move on to how we embody and enact this complexity as educators, emerging scholars, and community members.

### *Embodying and enacting conceptions of reconciliation*

*Markides:* Agreed. I worry my sharing about the conference may ruffle some feathers, but I needed to discuss the topic further to try and understand my strong emotional reaction. Our dialogue has helped me to better understand myself in these issues. This practice might not be the best path for everyone; but for me, I can attest to tremendous growth and learning through this work with you. Significantly, the yearlong course with Dr. Donald, Dr. Stewart, and Elder Cardinal has been one of the greatest experiences of my life. The sense of community we have created in a short time speaks to the robust nature of the teaching and learning. We share an openness and interest in the Indigenous Knowledges and four directions teachings. I appreciate that there are no big egos; we come together with reverence for the teachings from Elder Cardinal. We place our trust in him and he holds us in care — a sacred relationship between students and teacher. Another treasured event was when we co-presented at the Rouge Forum Conference (MacDonald & Markides, 2016). It was one of our first efforts to consciously enact reconciliation based on our learning from our duoethnographic research. I remember being nervous, questioning our *gall* to present on matters Indigenous — *who were we to talk about reconciliation?* — while knowing that the matters are *more than* Indigenous. *Reconciliation is for everyone.* We shared our work — the process and findings — and engaged the group in conversations related to the Calls to Action. What transpired was surprising and bountiful. One group took a critical look at our work and the TRC (2015a) document itself, while the other group opened up about their

understandings and apprehensions about reconciliation. Some participants shared their stories and histories; others gave candid accounts of being nervous to teach about Indigenous topics as soon-to-be teachers. The work and conversations took on lives of their own, bringing people into the dialogue and relationship, *as we took steps toward reconciliation*. I had not expected our activity to be so powerful; but in that moment, I learned a lot about the fear, commitment, and care experienced by others. This was a beginning point for me, a realization – we need to provide safe spaces to open conversations about reconciliation and explore the possibilities for education, especially for preservice and in-service teachers.

*MacDonald:* I understand your trepidation. For me, embodying reconciliation centers around honouring the various emotions that arise. It is important not to take short-cuts around the discomfort but to consider why such feelings emerge. It has been important for me to name the challenges and tensions I experience, and not avoid them because they are too uncomfortable. Our conference workshop provided a “safe space” for this exploration. As we considered how to support pre-service educators, I left wanting to emphasize that reconciliation is a *process*. It will not happen all at once, but requires individual and collective work to occur simultaneously. In another workshop we facilitated, I was struck when a teacher asked what could they do if they had to teach a lesson on Monday about residential schools and reconciliation? I have a hard time imagining that these topics could be packaged appropriately to be pulled out on Monday. My responsibility as an educator is to carry this work with care. I also get the impression that many people do not know where or how to begin. *What are entry points to this work?* As we work through these puzzles, I often feel like I am in kindergarten again. I likely say the wrong things and constantly make mistakes. We are encouraged by Elder Cardinal to slow down and not to fret if we stumble (personal communication, February 4, 2017) – the stumbling too is a teaching. With his words, I am reminded to be gentle on myself as I work to unlearn deep-seated colonial ways. I reflect on our course experiences and how my understandings of place and being in relation have evolved. With the guidance of our teachers, I felt a shift from being in a place of discomfort to a place focused on building meaningful relationships. I keep turning to Donald’s (2016) work explaining the wisdom teachings around his notion of ethical relationality as “an ecological understanding of organic connectivity that becomes readily apparent to us as human beings when we honour the sacred ecology that supports all life and living” (p. 3). The more I learn and internalize these teachings, the lighter I feel. I think about the sacred kinship relations and I find myself listening and observing more attentively. While conducting the place-study and moon-study assignments, I grew to appreciate the mysteries of the moon. Equally, my time spent studying place at Nosehill Park helped me reimagine how I might teach more holistically in my own context.

*Markides:* It is interesting how this work stays with us. We have both described the *weight* of the conversation. You have remarked about feeling *lighter* when considering the interconnectivity of all living things. In our early coursework, I remember you talking about the life force of rocks. Your reverence for all earthly things stood out to me then and now. I value the reach of the assignments in our Holistic Approaches to Life and Living course. We make our own meaning from the experiences of both the moon-study and the place study. I noticed early on that I am in a better place when I am outside attending to the moon. In the summer, I am camping — spending time outdoors, keeping active, and enjoying quality time with my husband and kids. We live well together: watching for wildlife, talking as we drive, and taking in the beauty of the vast countryside. When life gets busy, I miss seeing the moon — it reminds me to slow down and take stock of what really matters. Being in *my place* for the place-study, I have been making peace with the river. It will be five years this June since the flood waters spilled over the banks of the Highwood River, but the effects of the flood are still felt — still present — throughout the town. During the heavy rains of spring, we watch the waters rise with apprehension and lingering fear. It can be a hard way to live. I am now much more attentive to the changing land, and even more watchful of the ebbing and flowing water. My *place* by the river is bittersweet and beautiful. *I should have been more attentive to it before...* This learning is a process — a journey with many friends and teachers. As you have described, everyone is at different places with reconciliation. There are people who appear to navigate the terrain more easily than others. Some are more critical too. With over a year of duoethnographic dialogue, we are no more *experts* than when we began. However, I would say that we have grown in our capacities to initiate discussion and to consider differing points of view. These experiences have helped us to lead discussions in many circles, including presentations at teachers' conventions and in our volunteer commitments with *Walking with Our Sisters — Calgary*. I, too, am discouraged when teachers ask, "What can we use in our classrooms on Monday?" This mentality is a direct reflection of the flawed, western system that packs professional learning into convenient (but often empty) one-hour or single-day packages. In terms of *education for reconciliation*, I believe we first need *reconciliation for education* — a shift in how the education system is conceptualized. This may be a place for resurgence and reawakening. I hazard to say that one side of our conversation has been speaking to the other side of our conversation, unbeknownst to us. The learning we experience in our Indigenous coursework appears to address the needs we see for *process-oriented teachings* in pre-service teacher education programs and in-service teachers' professional development; in your words, we may "reimagine how [we] might teach more holistically in [our] own context."

*MacDonald:* I appreciate you pointing out that one side of our conversation is speaking to the other. There is both weight and lightness, simplicity and complexity. I value our exchange and find myself constantly negotiating when

to step in and when to step back. When to be bluntly honest and when to gently suggest a different perspective. I think a lot about my use of language. I am always negotiating how to best live this every day, and not only when it is convenient for me. Part of enacting reconciliation then is *making choices* — do I spend my energy in conversations with people who are not open and just want to argue, or do I find experiences that ignite my spirit? I absolutely agree that education as ready-made products and practices is the fault of the established system, not the individual teachers. Drawing on my different experiences in outdoor education, I arrived at my interest in these issues from a place of curiosity. Outside the four-walls of the traditional classroom, teaching and learning occur more organically. I am asked to respond to students and the environment in different ways. I have long believed in the importance of place-based learning; but through newfound Indigenous ways of knowing and being, I am confronted with another truth — the natural environment is much more than a mere place for me to explore with students. This realization calls my teaching processes and program outcomes into question. *How might I guide students to relate holistically to the places we visit?* Learning about reconciliation, I try to keep my ego in check. It would be silly for me to guide an outdoor trip once a year in a place I do not know, and pretend I know the land. Instead, I talk to locals, learn stories, and form partnerships. I know there is much more work ahead. Place-based knowledge and skills cannot be taught in a 3-day course, but require extended time learning *with* all sentient beings.

*Markides:* I think your questioning of *when to step in* and *when to step back* is the process of reconciliation at work within you — negotiating and re-negotiating your ways of knowing, being, and doing. Your struggle is real and provides a vital exemplar of how we must grapple with forces — external and internal — to bring about change. I admire your honesty and courage. This again may be the “stumbling” that Elder Cardinal recognizes as important to learning — the kind not to be rushed through or avoided — rich and meaningful in the experience. Might we consider this an example of reconciliatory praxis?

***Reconciliatory praxis: From deep reflection to conscientious action***

*MacDonald:* I think our time with Elder Cardinal and engagement with other course activities is a model for reconciliatory praxis. This model has not only deepened my cultural understandings, but has made a difference in who I am and how I see the world. Hearing stories from the Elder, being part of a circle with Indigenous and non-Indigenous peers, and participating in experiential learning opportunities have all greatly influenced me. It has transformed how I think about and endeavor to live a balanced life. It has changed how I want to teach. It has improved how I endeavor to treat myself and how I approach relationships. I pause to reflect on my high school experience and the lack of recognition or interaction with Mohawk students. We were not in respectful Treaty relationships. I was not even conscious of the nation-to-nation differ-

ence, of Treaties, or of the agreement Treaties set out. Even as my curiosity towards Indigenous worldviews grew and I learned of the significant difference in ontology, axiology, and epistemology, I was not cognizant of Treaties nor did I make an effort to be in a relationship. This was not for lack of interest but I did not know how to begin. Therefore, when I started graduate school, my knowledge of Indigenous worldviews was mostly from academic text. I relied on the cognitive and solitary modes of learning that were familiar to me. The land-based course, however, was more enriching because it opened up other ways of knowing (physical, emotional, and spiritual) and emphasized being part of a collective. We did not dwell in the difference, merely read *about* treaties, nor discuss notions of reconciliation, but we lived them out.

*Markides:* I must admit, my knowledge of treaties has been quite superficial for most of my life. Treaties were introduced in social studies as part of our history – as documents from the past. We coloured maps to show the treaty regions as they overlay a template map of Canada. It was an empty activity that fostered an empty understanding. To me, treaties were the stagnant documents that locked First Nations groups into life on reserves. I could see they were unfair deals, especially considering the vast lands for which they were signing over their rights. The deals seemed disproportionate. *Why would anyone give up so much, for so little?* As an adult, I understand that events in history can be told from many perspectives. Some stories become commonplace, with circumstances and details that are twisted over time such that people begin to believe that Indigenous people *needed* treaties to save them from their savage and primitive ways. King (2003) pointed out the ironies of how U.S. and Canadian governments have come to view treaties with ir/reproachable regret, as though “Native rights had been ‘gifted’ to Native people” (p. 137). Seen as a generous gesture for so long, some people will tell you that Indigenous peoples are no longer *owed* anything. *Assimilate already.* This sentiment is toxic, and yet prevalent. I appreciate that we have not dwelled in these contested spaces, but continue to receive new teachings that provide insight into past, present, and future. For me, reconciliatory education is less about blame than it is about relationship building. I am grateful that our learning has focused more on understanding each other’s worldviews rather than rehashing the wrongs of the past and the broken promises of the present. Elder Cardinal’s teachings are gentle and hope-filled. I learn more from this positive example than I do from approaches based in blame and retribution; hence, the *wisdom* in the wisdom teachings. Despite all of the mistreatment and significant legacies of our colonial past, Indigenous teachers continue to model respectful ways for being in the world and with each other – invaluable teachings.

*MacDonald:* The visual of your overlaying maps makes me recognize how these agreements are often seen as historical and separate from us presently. Much of my early social studies education began with the arrival of Jacques Cartier and my only memory learning of First Peoples was linked to the fur trade.



We never considered the original relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, speaking about Indigenous cultures in past tense. We have already spoken about the various complexities at work here, and the multiple tensions I face unlearning colonial ways. While I feel paralyzed by systemic issues — feeling too small to have an influence — I feel openings as I learn my responsibilities as a treaty person. Venne (2011) shares the oral understanding of the treaty process as learned from her Cree Elders. I am drawn to the resilience and commitment of Indigenous peoples and the importance of land throughout her narrative. She stated: “One of the main treaty rights of the non-indigenous person is to respect the land. This is not being done.... The non-indigenous people are forgetting to have respect for the land and all its relationships” (Venne, 2011, p. 7). I return to the importance of relationships. It will be a lifelong, and deeply layered, process to unlearn colonial ways, but there are ways I can practice being a good treaty person each day — both in my human-to-human and human-to-more-than-human relations. The pedagogical possibilities here seem endless, inviting others to join the circle, and honouring that multiple relationships do exist. This is a real difference between worldviews and necessity to understand treaty relationships. In terms of praxis, how do you see spaces being opened for renewing relationships?

*Markides:* Through the place-study assignment with Elder Cardinal, I have cultivated a greater relationship with “my place” along the Highwood River. I have spent time there more consciously. I reflect on the relationship too. It has been deep learning that reveals itself slowly. It has nurtured my interest in nature photography and my interest in nature photography has nurtured my relationship with place. It has been an entry point that feeds my passion for the plants, wildlife sightings, and seasonal changes. I am more attentive now. It is through this study that I have come to appreciate the importance of place-based relationships. *How can we make informed and mindful decisions related to land use without first knowing and caring for the land?* For me, a place-based relationship is intimate and requires: commitment, maintenance, and responsibility. I have also gained a greater sense of belonging — to *this* place, *my* place, along the river. Perhaps it is feelings like this that inspire figures of speech around “putting down roots” and “being well grounded.” On a deeper level, I can imagine that having a strong connection to place may affect all aspects of a person’s life. It would have also significant implications for communities who have lived this way for thousands of years. I see this type of land-based teaching as an entry point into greater cultural understanding — an entry point for developing empathy for another worldview. I am interested to know how you envision land-based education as reconciliatory praxis.

*MacDonald:* I find your questioning of land-based education as reconciliatory praxis interesting because this is what drew me to pursue doctoral studies. I was led here by other outdoor environmental educators (Root, 2011; Scully, 2012) who were asking similar questions and by the powerful experiences I



was having with students on wilderness trips. I drift away from this focus, but continuously return. Each time with slightly different perspective. There is something profound for me in this process. My linear ways of understanding have been disrupted, and I see the importance of constantly circling back. The more awareness I gain and knowledge I collect, I am able to re-story past experiences and shape new meaning from my earliest memories. For example, when I look back at photos from my childhood of unassuming family trips to the lake, I now see those experiences as decolonizing. In these moments, we were in relationship with the land and our extended kinship circles. I have gathered a similar sense working with Elder Cardinal. He addresses the group with a story but his story is understood differently depending on how we listen and our prior experience. We all take something different away and our ability to listen at deeper levels improves over time. It has been my experience that his stories return unexpectedly to me when I am doing other tasks. In these moments, the stories take on deeper meaning in my life. The Elder continues to teach. I mention this because it is vital to my re-visioning of land-based learning. I think it is possible to use experiential learning to re-story our understandings and relationships with the land and each other. Towards reconciliation, we might consider that the land, through all of its mysterious ways, is *or can be* explicitly positioned as the teacher.

## EMERGENT THEMES FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION

### *Expanding the circle*

We see a growing need for safe (and also risky) spaces for conversations. There are deeply-rooted stereotypes, systemic problems, and other power dynamics that make navigating these conversations difficult, and at times, impossible. Many layers of influence affect people's readiness and/or openness to reconciliation. Little Bear (2000) described how a holistic worldview is at odds with a fragmented or partitioning worldview. In the reconciliatory process, there are competing needs, visions, and priorities — an inherent bringing together of different worldviews. At times, we find it challenging to negotiate conversations in different contexts within our wider communities; these discussions require tact and involve risk, knowing when to speak up and when to keep quiet. Where are our energies best spent?

In light of the issues, entanglements, and potentially contentious subject matter, we found it imperative to create safe spaces for dialogue; but what does it mean for a space to be *safe*? Some of our greatest learning has come from the difficult and/or unsafe topics and emotionally taxing work. Who decides what is *safe*? And, *should it be safe*? Mindfully, we continue to seek opportunities to create these spaces for discussion — to expose and address needs in educational circles.

*Land-based and community-based learning opportunities*

We also see a need for grassroots learning opportunities. Through our courses, participation with community groups, and invitations to participate in ceremony, we have benefited from developing relationships and learning in Indigenous circles — gifts, not rights. It has been invaluable and life-changing to learn from and with Indigenous people, rather than about them. We dwell in the holistic teachings from Elder Cardinal. He meets us where we are at in our journeys — in a responsive, dynamic, and unfolding relationship. Experiential teachings disrupt the Western norms, pushing us outside of our comfort zones and expanding our understanding of Indigenous worldviews. The learning takes time. In many of the teachings, place-based learning has been a central focus, acknowledging the interconnectivity of all entities. If we start by considering all decisions and actions with the knowledge that the land is sentient, it changes our positioning. We become oriented towards more sustainable and more honourable ways of being, knowing, and doing.

**NOT SO FINAL THOUGHTS: WHAT NEXT?**

Our dialogue reflects the voices and works of the scholars, educators, and Elders who have touched our lives. We recognize that the aforementioned themes are from our perspectives and that the meaning-making will be different for everyone. The interpretations we have made are personal, yet they inform our next steps. Once we have been given teachings, we have a responsibility to carry them forward.

Among the many questions that arose from our work, three questions stood out in interest and importance. *How might we collectively enact the Calls to Action?* In our contexts, we hope to expand our dialogue to engage more people and perspectives. We see that various stakeholders in various sectors are making efforts toward reconciliation; yet we worry these initiatives will be misguided or reduced to tokenisms — we will have to do more than acknowledging the territorial land on entryway posters if we want to make change. It is a beginning, not a means to an end. The way we see it, reconciliation has no end.

*How might we best honour and (begin to) redress the complexities of reconciliation?* This requires that we recognize and respect that individuals and communities are at different places in their journeys of healing and reconciliation. In our efforts and actions, we can continue to create spaces for discussion, facing issues of racism and privilege openly. We also honour that these conversations are challenging, difficult, emotional, and uncomfortable for some, requiring inner and outer work.

*How do we teach holistically in our own contexts?* As educators, we want our teaching practices to be informed and impactful. We ask ourselves, and each other, what can we do and how can we do it well? How can we fulfill our ethical obligations to All Our Relations and honour the seven generations past, and to come?

We maintain our commitment to the process. Reconciliation is more than a single event. To be fully realized, everyone will need to engage in genuine forms of learning, relationship building, and advocacy. We have all been called upon – by the TRC, residential school survivors, and legacy holders – to live well, together. This requires us to ask: *Where do I see myself in reconciliation? What responsibilities do I have?* Hopefully, with enough time, education, and effort we will begin to see systemic change. As education for reconciliation becomes more commonplace, perhaps we will see a reconceptualizing of our education system – reconciling the structures – towards reconciliation for education. In these ways, we would want our children, all children, and future generations to be educated in love and in community, with and on the land.

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JENNIFER MACDONALD is a doctoral student in Educational Research with the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. Emerging from experiences as an outdoor environmental educator, her research focuses on felt-experience, interpretations of the other-than-human world, meaning-making, and ethical ecological relationships. [jennifer.macdonald2@ucalgary.ca](mailto:jennifer.macdonald2@ucalgary.ca)

JENNIFER MARKIDES is a Métis doctoral student specializing in Educational Research with the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. Her SSHRC-funded, arts-based research explores the experience of the 2013 High River Flood from the perspectives of high school students who graduated the year of the disaster. [jmarkid@ucalgary.ca](mailto:jmarkid@ucalgary.ca)

JENNIFER MACDONALD est étudiante au doctorat en recherches éducationnelles à la *Werklund School of Education* de l'Université de Calgary. Inspirée par son expérience comme éducatrice environnementale en plein air, elle cible ses recherches sur les expériences vécues, l'interprétation du monde non-humain, la recherche de sens et les relations entre l'éthique et l'écologie. [jennifer.macdonald2@ucalgary.ca](mailto:jennifer.macdonald2@ucalgary.ca)

JENNIFER MARKIDES est une doctorante métisse se spécialisant en recherche éducationnelle à la *Werklund School of Education* de l'Université de Calgary. Son projet de recherche financé par le CRSH et basé sur les arts étudie le phénomène de l'inondation de la High River en 2013, en s'attardant aux points de vue d'étudiants du secondaire ayant gradué l'année de cette catastrophe naturelle. [jmarkid@ucalgary.ca](mailto:jmarkid@ucalgary.ca)