My Journey to Reconciliation:

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“Historical Ignorance.” (Thompson, 2022)

The phrase above is used to describe the buried past, something that has often been overlooked and undermined.

My journey to reconciliation has made me aware of issues such as historical ignorance, intergenerational trauma, and education in relation to reconciliation. In the following I will discuss what I’ve learned about the above and offer my own and other’s examples.

Reconciliation is defined by Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commision (TRC) as “…establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country.” (Indigenous Corporate Training Inc., 2018). To continue achieving this reconciliation Canada’s attacks on Indigenous culture must be recognized. Acknowledgement is a first step in aiding the removal of biases and ignorance of past events. Simple acknowledgement however is not enough, reflection is the crucial second part to recognition. Reflection requires viewing Canada’s and Indigenous peoples history objectively. As in, honestly and without misinformation. By knowing history, reconciliation can move from mind to method and become actions.

These steps: acknowledgement, reflection, and action, also go along with a fourth step, consequence. Consequence is not necessarily a negative thing, in this example it is the longer term effects of implementation and application of reconciliation. Consequence should not be overlooked, as it determines the effectiveness of previous actions.

I’ve learned that even recently Canada’s government has taken action that has led to less than successful outcomes for reconciliation. Such as issuing apologies without offering very tangible aid. This manifests in what I call faulty language, which is the use of vague wording in official government documents that opens up to interpretation. Interpretation that can, has been,

and is exploited by the government. Small clauses of these legislations can be of incredible importance in their long-term consequences; a few poorly worded sentences can be enough to change someone's life. Clear, concise, and supportive legislation shouldn't be as hard as, at times, it has proven to be. Historically we have many documents that show this faulty language. Such as 1969's The White Paper which sought to abolish the 1876 Indian Act, an act that had historically sought to govern Indigenous culture by and large (The Indian Act, Indigenous Foundations: University of British Columbia, n.d, section 1, 2, 4, 7). The potential removal of this act was viewed by many as further assimilation of Aboriginal peoples into Canadian culture. The White Paper would also propose removal of Indian Status and would designate reserve land into private property amongst other changes (The White Paper 1969, Indigenous Foundations: UBC, n.d, n.p). These amendments to Aboriginal rights were fiercely opposed as the changes attempted to enforce Canadian assimilation by way of removing any unique Indigenous status whatsoever (The White Paper 1969, Indigenous Foundations: UBC, n.d, Responses to the white paper).

Prior to The White Paper the Federal government requested a survey be carried out on Aboriginal needs and policies by UBC anthropologist Harry B. Hawthorn (The White Paper 1969, Indigenous Foundations: UBC, n.d, What led to the white paper?). Hawthorn went on to write in his report that Aboriginal peoples are some of the most disadvantaged among Canada's population. Along with this Hawthorn adds that to fix the growing divide between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, Federal and Provincial branches of government would have to work together with the Aboriginal population (Hawthorn, 1966, p. 345, para. 4, 5, 6). Following this survey a consultation of Aboriginal representatives took place in Ottawa, May 1966. One of the results of this was issues on education being brought to light (The White Paper 1969, Indigenous

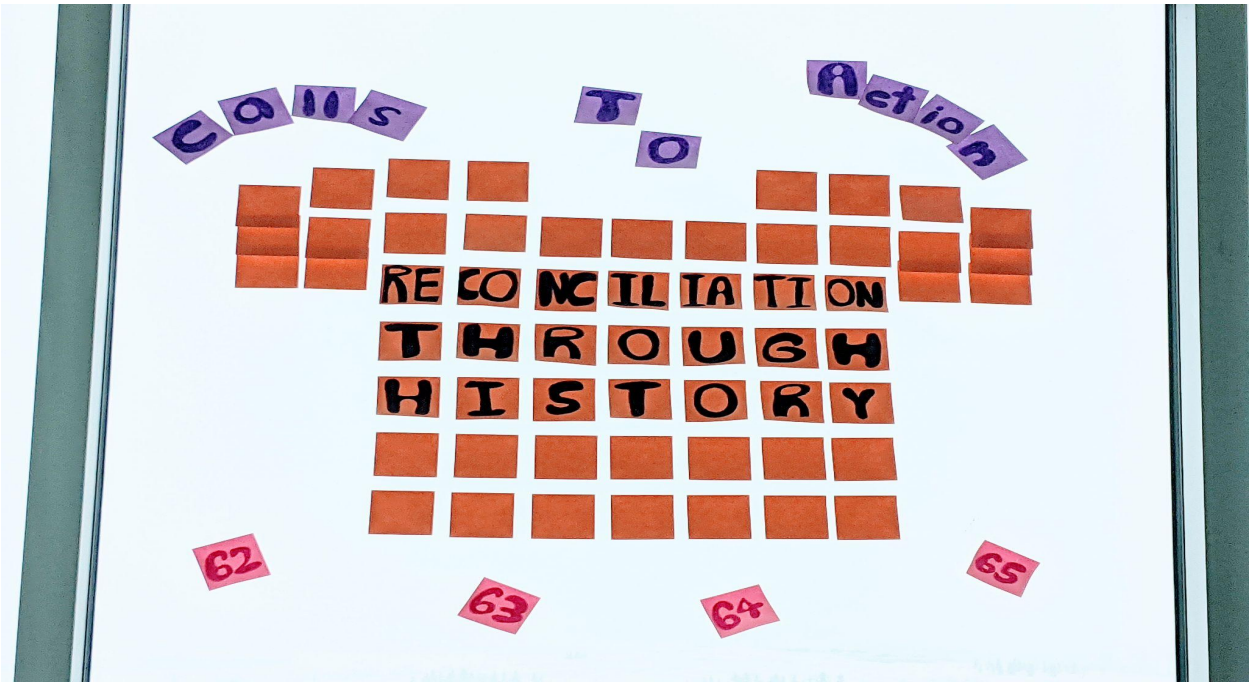
Foundations: UBC, n.d, What led to the white paper?). Unfortunately the issues raised by the Aboriginal representatives were overall ignored in favour of implementing The White Paper roughly three years later. The resulting uproar –mentioned previously– would result in the dissolution of The White Paper in 1970, with the then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau stating, “We’ll keep them in the ghetto as long as they want.” (Lagace & Sinclair, 2020, para. 12). This sentiment from the Prime Minister echoes the lack of understanding or care present within government structures at the time, and to a varying degree, today. The White Paper acknowledges Indigenous peoples, yet barely touches on its own implicit history of abuse of said Indigenous peoples (Chrétien, 1969, p. 7). It frames itself as a positive change while failing to recognize its shortcomings in addressing issues important to Indigenous communities. The difficulties of policy changes, ignorance, and lack of affirmative action, have taught me that knowing your history and reflecting on it –to implement positive change– requires a few simple steps. First and foremost, listening; keeping in mind whom the changes directly affect most. Secondly incorporating what is learned from listening into applicable knowledge, and lastly ensuring the application stays strong long-term and keeping flexibility in mind in case of future amendments.

"How does one determine identity?" (Thompson, 2022)

Intergenerational trauma is a phenomenon that encompasses demoralization, dissociation, reciprocated violence, self-sabotage, and a lack of self-worth. It is a plague that disrupts parents and children alike regardless of age. The demoralization in children comes from decades of previous experience. Experience that their parents and their grandparents suffered through and are now passing on as a variety of traumas. As someone who has encountered intergenerational trauma in peers and is pursuing a career in education, it is doubly important to me that the brutal

effects of unchecked traumas are dealt with effectively. A fundamental perspective to understand intergenerational trauma (IT) is that someone suffering from IT is barred from making the best decisions they otherwise could due to rampant trauma that more than likely affects many others in their close proximity. Hence they cannot just “do better” they instead must first heal past their wounds to regain their composure (Methot, 2019, p.47). In Methot’s book, *Legacy*, Methot asks not what's wrong with those afflicted by IT, but what happened and is happening to them. This approach is refreshing and offers the opportunity for people to use their voice. Cultivating a community that is nurturing to cultural needs can lessen some of the potential feelings of inadequacy. If you are raised in an inclusive and reciprocally respectful and positive home, you are much more likely to give that same love back to others. As part of my journey towards reconciliation I hope to arrange trauma training on-campus for education students and anyone interested.

I think knowing our history is an essential part of repairing current issues facing Indigenous peoples throughout Canada. Education is an avenue to teach this history. It offers opportunities to learn a variety of thoughts from a multitude of generations, and if used correctly aids the goals of reconciliation.



My aesthetic piece represents the explicit and transparent nature of the TRC's Calls to Action, in relation to Education for Reconciliation, and the strong tie history has with reconciliation. Such as the orange shirt honouring residential school survivors and those who did not survive. Aspects of this history have only fairly recently been brought to mainstream attention through historical evidence. Examples being Indigenous testimony, mass graves, and inconsistent residential school reports. The inclusion of the orange shirt is also intertwined with intergenerational trauma as a means of history passed on, negatively as the long lasting effects of residential schools, and positively as the changes in education being spearheaded now. The sixty-third Call to Action identifies a need for educators to commit to further growth and integration of Indigenous history into classrooms (the remaining three referenced Calls to Action are a part of the Education for Reconciliation section in the TRC). The fourth point of the sixty-third Call to Action mentions the need of continued teacher training in these areas of reconciliation (Truth and Reconciliation Commision of Canada: Calls to Action, 2015, p.7).

Continued professional development and learning is something I will continue to pursue throughout my teaching journey and my journey to reconciliation.

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