

Journey Toward Reconciliation: Discovering the Balance Between Learning and Doing

Britton Perkowitsch

Faculty of Education University of Regina

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Julie Machnaik

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My journey toward reconciliation is a continual process that will assist my upcoming teaching career and life in general. It began when I was introduced to Orange Shirt Day and residential schools in grade seven. However, the term “reconciliation” did not appear until I attended high school. During those four years, I grasped the meaning of this term and noticed a significant increase in my comprehension of Indigenous history. The university classes I have attended furthermore contributed to my overall journey, considering I learned a variety of new topics about reconciliation that were undiscussed in previous years. Those include the power of white privilege, equity concerning diversity, and indigenization within a classroom setting. Despite my expansion of knowledge, my journey toward reconciliation is not just simply retaining new information. I was taught in high school that reconciliation meant recognizing and acknowledging past harms to form better relationships. Although this definition needs to be honoured, I realize it is what initiates my own journey. I underwent the base process of learning and acceptance, and my second phase is discovering how to actively implement the knowledge I obtain into my life and the others around me. Essentially, my current journey toward reconciliation is seeking the balance between learning and doing.

ECS 102 introduced me to white privilege, which opened my eyes to a further role I play as a future educator. One main takeaway I gained from the lectures is how privilege is socially constructed to benefit members of the dominant group. What is deemed “normal” and “not normal” in society is formed and defined by white dominance. An example of this concept is explained in the book, *Is everyone really equal?* Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) state, “Students of Color and Indigenous students are much more likely to be assessed by teachers as exhibiting problematic rather than desirable character traits” (p. 87). They describe how, if the teachers who form these assessments are white, it is evident that the dominant culture determines what

establishes normal behaviour. In addition, white privilege is often invisible to the dominant group because they are not the ones disadvantaged. Teachers with privilege will likely respond in defensiveness or denial if it becomes indicated due to their lack of acknowledging the advantage. Learning about white privilege pushed me to recognize and accept my own. This is the first step to minimizing its effects, and to advance further, I need to inform the people close to me about their white privilege. Specifically, my parents grew up in a time when this topic was rarely talked about. I remember discussing work applications with my dad and the idea that because I have a white name, I would be more successful in earning the job than someone who applies with an African-American name. My dad disagreed as he believes culturally distinct people are the priority when employers pick between applicants. This proves his refusal to accept the concept of white privilege. If we were to discuss this topic again, I would use the knowledge I have acquired to enlighten him on why he has a closed-minded opinion and how it is harmful. The view my dad has is unfortunate, however, it corresponds to his school experience. When I begin teaching, it is vital that I provide my students with an understanding of white privilege and the strategies to conquer the issues that arise from it. This will ensure they avoid the view my dad has obtained, and help break the cycle of oppression.

The concept of equity versus equality was a topic in ECS 101 that caught my attention. Throughout my life, I have been taught that I should “treat everyone the same.” However, the way to accomplish this task contrasts with what I initially anticipated. Equality means offering the same opportunity to every individual, yet it is not that simple. Equity needs to be established because it acknowledges individual differences and proposes that varying services, depending on the individual, will provide an equal opportunity for everyone. David Morley effectively explains how equity is necessary. He states, “Children in racialized ethnic groups, children and youth in

care, children with disabilities and children who carry the burdens of poverty and other life challenges have equal rights to be included and nurtured for their unique potentials” (UNICEF Canada, 2018). This quote accurately relays the diversity of children in schools, which is valued in an inclusive learning environment. Students must come first, and that requires a welcoming and accepting space for students’ interests, backgrounds, and needs (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 2). ECS 101 encouraged me to be conscious of my contribution to an inclusive setting. I learned that assessing the relationships I build is the initial step toward achieving this type of space. The swimming lessons I teach are an excellent start due to my interactions with diverse children. I remember a particular preschool-level class that involved my use of inclusivity. I had one student who did not speak English, and I decided to talk with their dad as it was my first time teaching a student with a language barrier. We created strategies that would fit his child’s needs, which included more demonstrations, hands-on corrections, and visuals. His child was successful and passed the level because of the way I handled the situation. The relationship I built with the student and their dad is just one example of how I developed an inclusive environment. As I continue my journey toward reconciliation, I will examine other areas of my relationships.

The Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action is a guide that will proceed into my teaching career. Although it was a recommended reading in high school, when I entered university, my classes provided me with the resources to explore its meaning and use within a classroom setting. I learned how important it is as an educator to encourage students to acknowledge and respect truth and reconciliation. A few ways to achieve this include teaching how to make a land acknowledgement, decorating a classroom with Indigenous art, treaty flags, and the medicine wheel, and presenting educational videos about residential schools. Despite

how these are significant actions that I will utilize in my future classroom, my goal is to discover methods to honour Indigenous peoples' culture and history that are creative and new. One method is through my aesthetic representation. This project prompted me to take the topic of



truth and reconciliation and connect it to my personal skill of painting. I decided to paint a landscape because it represents Mother Earth, which is sacred to the Indigenous culture.

Indigenous peoples advocate for her protection due to their deep respect for the land that ties in with their beliefs and values. Mother Earth has been around for an immense change from the pre-colonial period to the present day. She saw how it left society searching for balance again, and Joseph Naytowhow explains exactly what

type of balance I mean. He expresses, “I teach people to respect the old ways while embracing congruent contemporary ones” (Naytowhow, 2021). I believe one result of truth and reconciliation is this recognition of a balance between old and new. It also symbolizes my reconciliation journey of balance between learning and doing, in which I will use the other artistic skills I possess to embrace Indigenous peoples.

My journey to reconciliation comprises taking what I already know and will eventually learn and turning it into something I can project into my life and others. White privilege is a topic that I will teach more individuals how to accept and be aware of, as I have already accomplished it myself. With the use of equity, I will continue to establish inclusive settings that

value diversity in every area of my life. Honouring Indigenous peoples, especially in a classroom, is the principle of truth and reconciliation, and I can participate through my artistic practices. These are just a few of the many reconciliation concepts I have learned. As I continue my journey into my teaching career, I am hopeful all the concepts will be an active part of my life that will inspire my students to begin their own journey toward reconciliation.

References

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