

My Journey Towards Reconciliation: Looking Towards the Future

Avery LeClaire

University of Regina

My journey towards reconciliation has been going on before even attending university and I am sure that it will continue well after I leave. Throughout the semester I have been exposed to things that I have never seen, heard, or thought of before. The course has taught me a number of things that I know will be important in my journeys of teaching and reconciliation. There were many eye-opening moments in this course and in the field placement. When I was asked the question for this assignment, I really had to think and get to the core of what was being asked. Just like with reconciliation, I have to acknowledge my past in order to move forward.

***Teachers and Teaching Your: Unearned Privileges, Racism, Whiteness, Knowledge Construction, Coloniality, and Power***

While I am proud of my heritage and who I am, it would be wrong for me not to speak about certain aspects of who I am especially concerning my race, gender, and sexual orientation. Being a straight white male, it is hard to deny that I have been given privileges simply because of those factors. It is hard to pinpoint where and when these privileges come into play in my life. For the greater part of my life so far I have been ignorant of them. Not because I chose to ignore these things but because I simply was not aware. After learning more about the subject it goes without saying that I have benefited greatly from these things. While talking to my family about this assignment, my mother, who is attending university for social work, showed me a diagram in one of her books called the “Web of Oppression” (Mullaly & West, 2017). The diagram puts the most privileged categories towards the centre of the web. It really put things into perspective for me because while I was not blind to my privilege, seeing all of the categories towards the middle that I fit into gave me a reality check.

In terms of unearned privileges as a teacher, there are many. While it may seem nice that a teacher would have all of these benefits by simply standing in the front of a classroom, a lot of the privileges that one would think of all revolve around an imbalance of power in the classroom, which I do not agree with. Examples that go hand in hand are that students will speak when spoken to, raising their hands to speak and having the authority to tell someone whether they can go to the washroom or not. While I understand the meaning behind all of these and why these are in place in schools, they give the teachers a sense of power over the students and for some teachers, it is easy for this power to get to their heads. Another privilege is the instant respect that teachers get by simply being a teacher. I am not opposed to giving teachers respect, I respect almost all of my teachers that I have had over the years. However, from what I have experienced in my time at school is that some teachers do not treat their students with the same respect they would expect for themselves. This changed when I came to university. All of the teachers that I have had have been respectful and accommodating to others' needs.

### ***Learners and Learning: Difference, Diversity, Ways of Knowing***

It is silly for me to have thought this way but in the past, I was under the impression that everyone learned the same way and those who did not understand just did not understand. Throughout most of my elementary and high school years, I was only exposed to one way of learning, sitting in a desk listening to the teacher speak at the front of the room hoping to retain the knowledge they were giving me. It was not until later in high school and university especially where I learned about the different ways of studying, learning, and ways of knowing. Having only known things from a Western perspective, it was eye-opening to see all of these different ways that one can learn from. Through most of my university classes, there has been an

overwhelming focus on learning from an Indigenous perspective and learning through their ways of knowing. It is refreshing to see a whole new way of learning applied so seamlessly into the courses.

If there is one thing that I have learned from the years I have been at the University of Regina is that difference and diversity is incredibly important. Due to Canada's constantly changing demographics, there will always be diversity which is great. Due to this diversity, there are people who come from very different backgrounds and will ultimately have differences in learning, culture, and experiences. It is up to educators to embrace these differences and incorporate them into their lessons. Through the course and field experience, I have learned the most on this topic. Not only is there visible diversity, but there is an invisible diversity in students as well.

In the classroom that I was placed in, there is a wide range of children with very different and vibrant personalities. Due to the location of it being in Lumsden, the school is composed mostly of white settler children with a handful of visibly diverse children. Although it does not appear to be very diverse from a quick glance when you get to know the kids more it is easy to see that there is a very diverse group of students. There are students who have been diagnosed with autism and in the case of my class, there is a student who is on the autism spectrum and diagnosed with Oppositional Defiant Order. As the weeks have gone on it has been interesting observing how the teacher has responded to him. The teacher does not exclude him from the rest of the group or treat him as an outsider, she simply helps him when he is in need. After seeing Kyle Robinson's presentation on inclusive education, it surprised me to see how much of the things that he was talking about was being applied to my teacher's classroom. She

uses an approach that was brought up in the lecture instead of asking “where should you be, why are you not there?” she asks “where are you now, what is your next step?” (Robinson, 2020).

***Indigenization, Residential Schools in Canada and Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action***

It is very important to acknowledge what happened in the past, but it is equally important to be aware of what is happening in the present. As a future teacher with a major in social studies, I believe it is my job to tell the truth of what happened during this period. However, I do believe that simply dwelling on atrocities of the past is not enough. We as educators must strive to inform our students on important issues going on in Indigenous communities. While our institutions are promoting reconciliation, most of us stay ignorant to the world and issues in our own communities, such as the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women epidemic (Walker, n.d.); the Wet’suwet’en protests in British Columbia and across the country (The Canadian Press, 2020); the educational attainment gap between mainstream and Aboriginal students (Statistics Canada, 2018); and closer to home, the issues surrounding presenting poems from former University of Regina student Steven Kummerfield [Brown], the murderer of Pamela George (Mallick, 2020). I believe in order to achieve reconciliation we as educators should not pick and choose which things to incorporate into our lessons but view things as a whole.

When discussing reconciliation in Canada and our collective journeys towards it, it is important to look at the bigger picture of it all. We must not be blinded by the past because it does not allow us to see what is right in front of us. I am not saying to move on from the past because it still affects us today; intergenerational trauma being the most prevalent issue. We must be inclusive to all, learn from our mistakes of the past, and strive to make the future better than the present.

### References

Mallick, H. (2020, January 7). The injustice to Pamela George continues long after her murder.

Retrieved from

<https://www.thestar.com/opinion/star-columnists/2020/01/07/the-injustice-to-pamela-george-continues-long-after-her-murder.html>

Mullaly, R. P., & West, J. (2018). *Challenging oppression and confronting privilege: a critical approach to anti-oppressive and anti-privilege theory and practice*. Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press.

The Canadian Press. (2020, February 24). Timeline of Wet'suwet'en solidarity protests and the dispute that sparked them. Retrieved from

<https://globalnews.ca/news/6560125/timeline-wetsuweten-pipeline-protests/>

Statistics Canada. (2018, July 25). The educational attainment of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

Retrieved from

[https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-012-x/99-012-x2011003\\_3-eng.cfm](https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-012-x/99-012-x2011003_3-eng.cfm)

Robinson, K. (2020, March). *Ecs 100. ECS 100*. Regina.

Walker, C. (n.d.). Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women. Retrieved from

<https://www.cbc.ca/missingandmurdered/>