

My Journey To Reconciliation

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Throughout my first year of university, I have learned a lot about what reconciliation really means and looks like, inside and outside of the classroom. Relationships are a huge part of reconciliation but there is more to the process than that. My conscious journey to reconciliation started halfway through my first year of university during my Indigenous studies course and my Education Core Studies course. I learned so much more in these two classes than I could ever imagine. My journey then continued to a step of reflecting on my past and what I had been taught before university. I am now in the part of my journey where I want to strive to learn as much as I can in order to become a better person and a better ally of reconciliation. I have an idea of what I would like the future of my journey to look like but as I learn more, it may change. The most important thing I have learned about my own journey towards reconciliation so far is that I have to take responsibility for educating about and furthering the reconciliation process to my future students. As a non-Indigenous person, I have been humbled by what I have learned and I will forever be an ally in the reconciliation process. I know that I can never truly understand how the government and colonization and all of the terrible happenings of history have affected the Indigenous community, but it is my duty to learn as much as I can to try and understand as much as possible.

As a student I was only ever taught from the curriculum provided textbooks. My teachers never ventured any further into the history or culture than the curriculum stated. This made it hard for us students to connect and understand what happened and actually analyze how we felt about everything we were learning. These textbooks were not written by people of Indigenous background so we were not getting fully accurate and reliable information, we never got an Indigenous perspective. I want to strive for change in this way and give my students an

Indigenous perspective on everything we learn about the culture and history. I will still use the curriculum provided textbooks but I will dive deeper and make the students aware that sometimes history is not told by the right people. I want to have the students reflect on their own thoughts while we learn about such traumatic events of Canadian history. As students we were never asked to reflect on or analyze our feelings, I would like to change that.

It wasn't until I was about fourteen that I heard about reconciliation. I had learned about the Indigenous culture, residential schools, Orange Shirt Day, and the history of Canada and Indigenous peoples but I had not heard the word reconciliation brought up in any of these lessons. It is understandable that children of younger ages would have a hard time understanding but I still believe that we should teach children about the reconciliation process as young as possible so that they can have a deeper understanding of it. I think it is important to start our individual journeys to reconciliation at a young age so that once our students graduate and begin contributing to society in an institutional way, they will be more inclusive and mindful. It is our responsibility as teachers to form knowledgeable, respectful, understanding, and aware human beings who will make an effort on their own time to continue their reconciliation journey after we help them begin.

During my Indigenous Studies course of my first semester of university we went a lot deeper into the effects that the treaties, acts, and residential schools had on Indigenous peoples and their communities. Previously I had learned what treaties were about and what they symbolized but mostly from a European perspective rather than an Indigenous perspective. During the course I learned even more about how the Indigenous peoples during the signing of the treaties felt and truthfully how it had impacted them. Through this class I also learned the importance of support for the Indigenous community within the media. Through my Education

Core Studies course during my second semester I realized that I can use my new found knowledge to spread awareness about paying attention to the perspective that history is told by and to not trust every resource we encounter. This realization was the first step of my conscious journey to reconciliation.

Building new relationships and restoring old relationships is an essential step in the reconciliation process. There are many different types of relationships that need to be rebuilt. Examples could be the relationship between the government and all Indigenous peoples of Canada, the education system and all Indigenous peoples, and individual relationships such as biases/opinions against the Indigenous community. I might not be able to make a huge difference when it comes to the government's relationship with the Indigenous community but I can make a big change in individual relationships and as a future educator I can rebuild relationships between the education system and the Indigenous community. To help rebuild individual relationships I can check my own biases and really reflect on my own relationships and also help my peers to do the same. From an educational standpoint I can improve relationships by creating a hospitable and inviting classroom for each and every student. As Fatima Pirbhai-Illich and Fran Martin say in their article about invitation and hospitality in education, “[it is important to invite] who the student is (rather than who the teacher would like the student to be) which in turn means getting to know the student in a holistic way (rather than making assumptions about who the student is based on dominant, racialized categorizations and stereotypes)”. Another way I can help to rebuild the relationship between the education system and the Indigenous community is to decolonize education. I alone cannot do this, but I can positively affect my students by decolonizing my own classroom. My reconciliation journey is not about fixing the system but about positively affecting as many students as possible by educating them about Canada’s

history truthfully and about reconciliation. By decolonizing education we can bring Indigenous ways of knowing into the classroom in all subjects, this will help all students as it is a more hands-on and relational approach (Pirbhai-Illich & Martin, 2019).

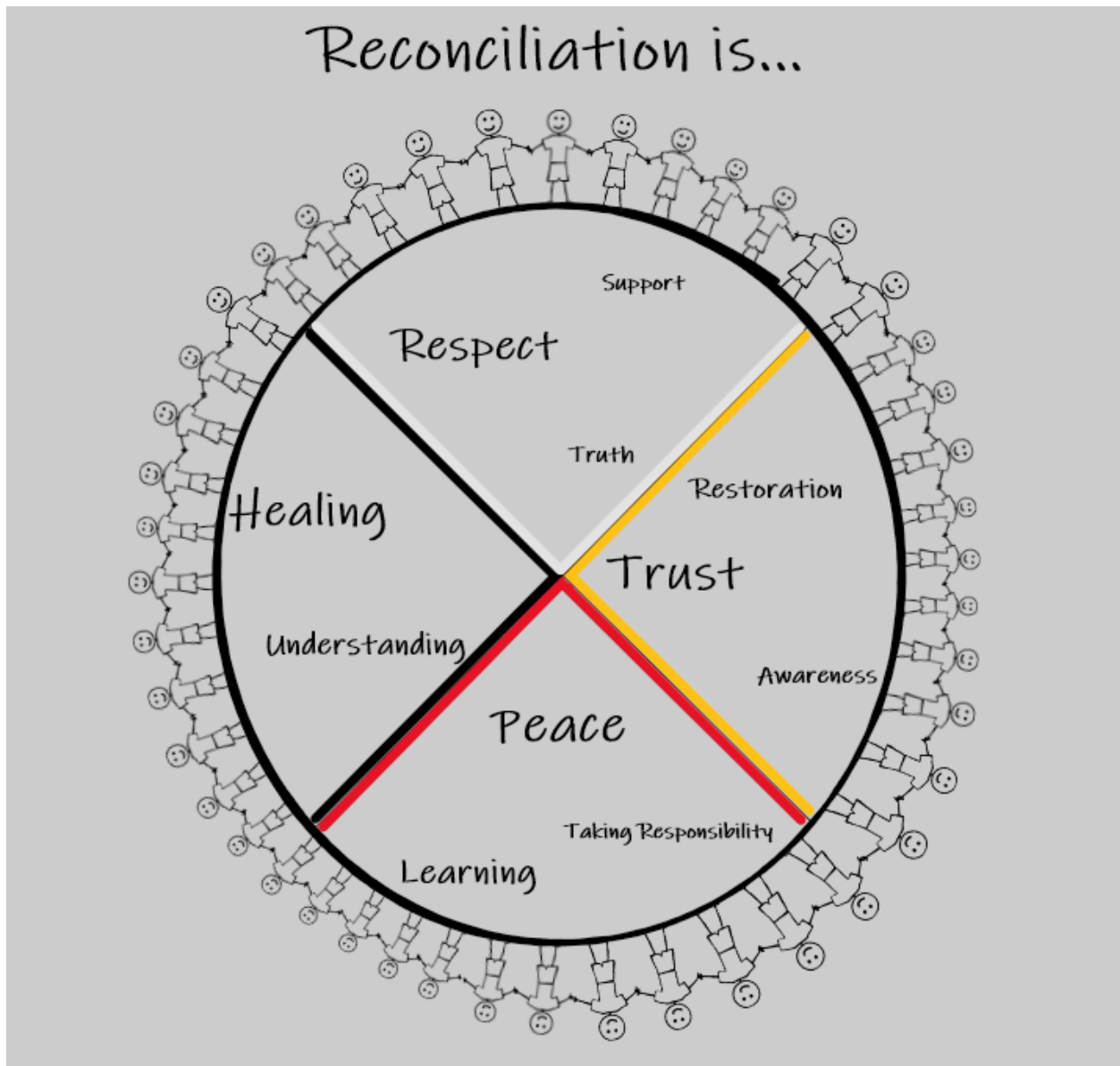
I think truth and respect have always been a part of my reconciliation but I did not realize how important they were until I read the TRC classroom discussion booklet (Canadian Teachers' Federation & National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2016). Seeing how much those students value truth and respect really opened my eyes to how critical the concepts are to reconciliation. Something I could definitely improve on in my own journey to reconciliation is to learn more about the truth of our history. A lot of our textbooks are written by non-Indigenous people who are trying to tell us about Indigenous history but are not doing so accurately. I want to try to read more Canadian and Indigenous history that is written by Indigenous writers. I want to find good sources for my future classrooms that more accurately portray the Indigenous culture and history rather than only using the curriculum provided texts. A great resource I can use as a teacher is the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation's "education" page on their website (*Education - NCTR*, n.d.). This website gives trustworthy and truthful resources to teachers and students from preschool to grade eleven, along with resources for adults too. This organization has taught me a lot about how important it is to get reputable sources when teaching and learning about residential schools and other parts of Indigenous history in Canada. I would also love to have my future students do an activity similar to the TRC booklet so I can teach them more about respect and truthfulness around the Indigenous culture and their history and reconciliation. This activity can also make them think deeper about their own journeys and really understand what happened in Canada's history.

Another great way I could bring truth and respect into my future classroom would be to introduce Indigenous ways of knowing and learning into my daily lessons. This can look like relational learning (Pirbhai-Illich & Martin, 2019), where I would take the kids outside and we would use hands-on experiences and learn from the land for various subjects. I would utilize the land in a way that positively affects and helps each student. As Pirbhai-Illich and Martin say, “from a relational perspective, the focus is on the space and what it enables in terms of learning, rather than on the boundaries of that space (school or classroom)”. This can also look like integrating the seven sacred or grandfather teachings into my future classrooms. The teacher’s guide written by Mary Cubello and Pauline Weber has given me lots of ideas and direction for ways I can teach about and include the seven teachings within my classroom. All seven of these teachings are important values that all children should learn, Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

Throughout the rest of my life and my journey towards reconciliation I want to strive to be a better person and a better listener. I want to be more respectful, humble, empathetic, and aware. These are all attributes that will help me in my personal journey as well as helping students begin their journeys too. I not only want to further and enlighten my own journey to reconciliation but I want to do the same for everyone around me as well. Helping other people with their journey is now a goal of mine for my own journey.

Aesthetic Representation

The larger words represent what I was taught reconciliation was during grades 1-12 and the smaller words represent what I have learned about reconciliation throughout my personal reconciliation journey so far and this class. As a collective, these words represent realizations and gained knowledge within my journey as described in my written aspect.



References

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