EDUC 460
READING
CH. 3

# ENSOULING OUR SCHOOLS

## A UNIVERSALLY DESIGNED FRAMEWORK FOR MENTAL HEALTH, WELL-BEING, AND RECONCILIATION

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with Kevin Lamoureux
Foreword by Ry Moran

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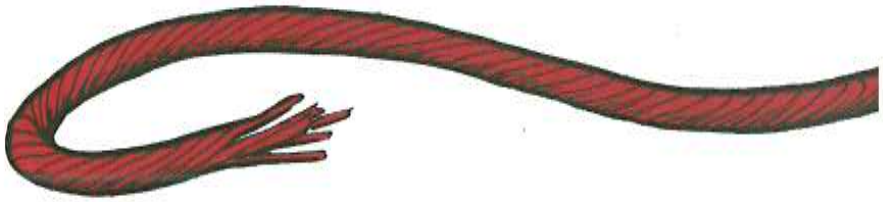

Chapter 3

# The TRC and Indigenous Worldviews of Education for Well-Being

When European settlers to Canada decided they needed to "do away" with Indigenous cultures, we all lost opportunities – an opportunity to live in peace and harmony, an opportunity to learn from and with each other. There was, and is, much Indigenous cultures can teach us, and some of the problems we now face with the environment, the role of women, and the loss of community could have been avoided. To move forward with reconciliation, we must all educate ourselves about the mistakes of the past so that we can avoid making them again, and so that we, as educators in a country so very much in need of reconciliation, can work together with forgiveness and healing as our goal. Justice Murray Sinclair, commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has said forgiveness is not a necessary requirement to begin reconciliation work, as this might put unfair expectations on survivors of residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, and so forth. We recognize this truth, while continuing to work toward reconciliation and healing as our goal, in the hope that this communal work will create a better Canada for all.

While the TRC is a Canadian undertaking, the story of colonialism, discrimination, and residential schools, and the need for change and healing is a global one. The word *Canadian* or *Canada* can be substituted with the names of many other countries in much of what follows. One thing that separates the Canadian experience (or sets the Canadian experience apart) is the nature and legal effects of our treaties with First Nations. Understanding these treaties is necessary for efforts toward reconciliation in Canada.

## Context and Relationship

On June 2, 2015, the TRC released its 94 Calls to Action as part of its final report to the people of Canada.[3] Participants in Ottawa witnessed many events and celebrations that drew Canadians together from across the country in a spirit of reconciliation. It was a powerful, inspirational experience. Here were people of all backgrounds and all faiths raising their voices in support of the survivors of Indian residential schools and their families. Here were people whose families originated

3 See <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=890>.

from other nations around the globe, who had since made Canada their home, and who were now gathered to hear difficult truths and to work toward reconciliation. Here there was no shame surrounding the abuses suffered in the past, and no silence; only a feeling of hope and optimism for a better future.

Many Canadians have either forgotten or have never learned about the partnership that founded Canada. Not every country can lay claim to that sort of history. Many nations, if we dig deep enough into their histories, are places that were founded on bloodshed, warfare, and human-rights violations. Certainly, Canada has its own history of colonialism and violence. But at its root, and in the founding documents that create the legal basis for our Confederation, it could not have been achieved without partnership with the First Nations of this land.

While this is not intended to be a chapter wholly about Canada's treaties with First Nations, it is worth noting that these treaties were originally made through the coming together of Indigenous peoples and new Canadians, as part of a new Canada, on behalf of generations of new Canadians who would later come to call these lands home. This is true for the earliest Peace and Friendship Treaties on the East Coast, which did not cede land, and continued with the post-Confederation numbered treaties, though that original spirit and intent was gradually forgotten or ignored as the young nation of Canada grew. As that spirit and intent was lost, and as newcomers and younger generations were denied the opportunity to learn about these treaties, the relationship between Indigenous peoples and settlers deteriorated. In fact, many government policies emerged with the deliberate intention of eliminating Indigenous peoples as cultural groups that had previously been so necessary to the survival and well-being of European settlers. Part of the truth we are being asked to explore by the TRC is the truth that our country is a treaty country, a country made possible through agreements between Indigenous peoples and settlers – agreements that are as sacred as they are legal.

One mistake many Canadians make when they are new to conversations about treaty agreements is their belief the treaties are so far in our country's past that their significance today is little more than theoretical or sentimental. If there was any introduction to treaties at all, the story we learned was one of bad deals signed in bad faith with Indigenous communities that were poor negotiators willing to trade away large swaths of land for trinkets and beads. Thanks to a growing emphasis on treaty education, emphasis in schools on Indigenous histories, and the testimonies of residential-school survivors, we are now being confronted with a new understanding of what it means to be Canadian. For many there is a grieving and natural frustration that comes with learning these stories for the first time – many feel robbed of a national identity that should have been their birthright. Non-Indigenous people are realizing how much has been hidden from them, and how much was lost when Indigenous cultures and peoples were segregated and marginalized. It is amazing how quickly Canadians will embrace a new national narrative when their own experiences are honoured and they are respected as potential allies. Reconciliation implies that all involved have been denied a relationship that should have always been theirs to begin with.

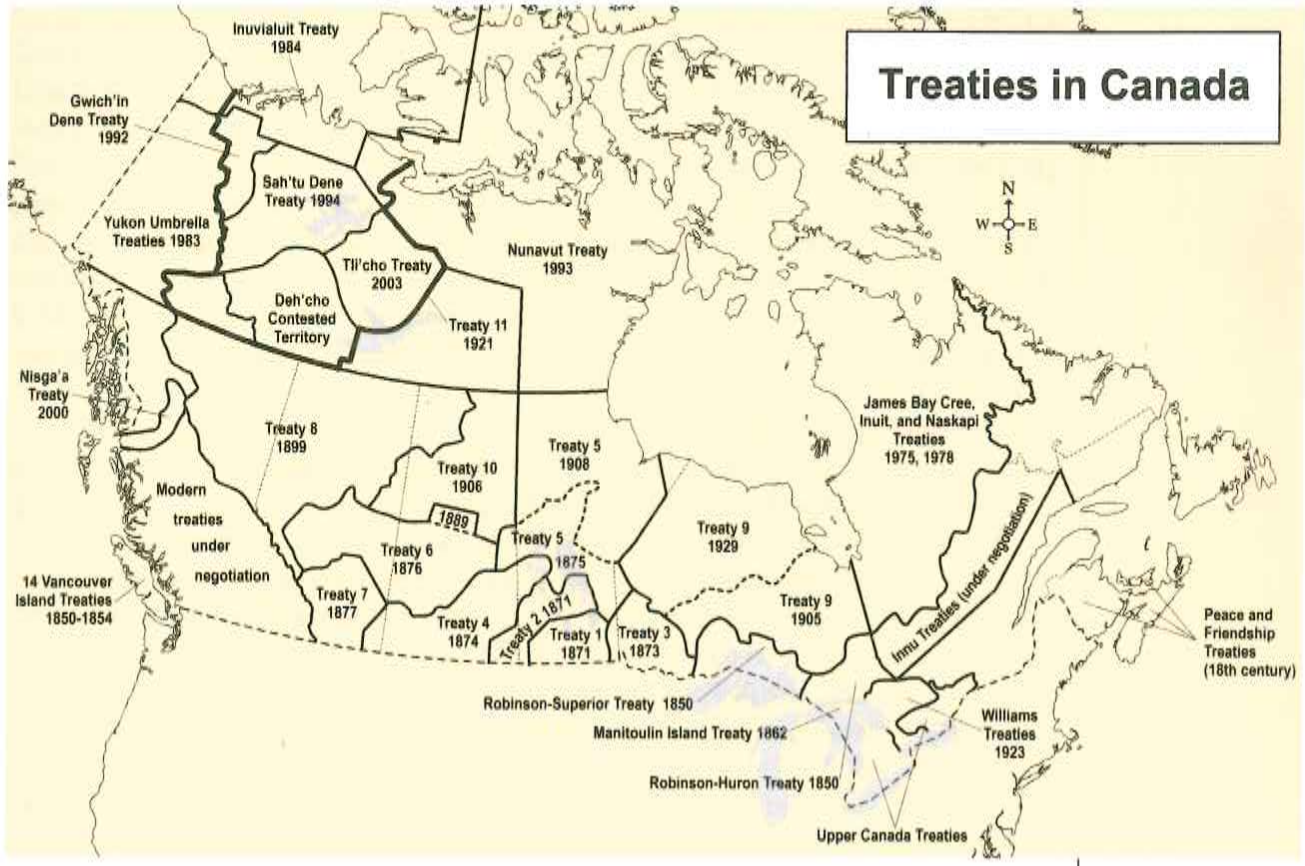


**Figure 3.1** Treaty Territories of Canada

The treaties in Canada are still as legally and socially relevant today as the day they were signed. In Canada, we are all treaty people. What this means is that somewhere in our family or social history someone entered into an agreement on our behalf that guaranteed for us certain opportunities and obligations. What is special about our governments' treaties with First Nations peoples is that Canada is a nation founded on partnerships. The treaties set the legal framework for that relationship now and into the future. Contrary to the understandings, or misunderstandings, that many of us grew up with about treaties, there is nothing ancient, theoretical, or sentimental about our treaty identity. Treaties are enshrined in the "legal DNA" of Canada. For most Canadians, this should be a good thing. We can all enjoy a sense of belonging when we acknowledge "we are all treaty people" (a phrase coined by the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba to honour the legacy of treaties). We can also feel a great sense of relief in knowing that the treaties are enshrined in Canadian law. Today, many Canadians are just beginning to learn about how peace, friendship, military alliances, lands, and the resources upon that land were obtained through the numbered treaties. Many are just now learning how the treaties created a future for the people who would move here, the industries that would be created, the wars that would be avoided (as compared to our American neighbours whose Indian Wars lasted for 125 years),

and the nation that would stretch from sea to sea to sea. Thanks to all of these, grounded in the support and partnership of Indigenous peoples, Canada has become one of the wealthiest and most successful nations in human history. Our country is the shining beacon of hope and opportunity that many people around the globe have left their homes to be part of.

For Indigenous people, their story didn't unfold anything like the way it should have, nor in the way those who signed the treaties intended it to. Indigenous people involved with these negotiations were shrewd negotiators who understood their bargaining position and used it to strategically and capably leverage for the best arrangements they could. Stories of First Nations and Inuit people as hapless participants in one-sided negotiations who traded away large swaths of land for trinkets are ridiculous fictions that have no place in the modern world. Likewise, no one at these negotiations bartered in the hope of laying the foundation for future cultural genocide, as happened to Indigenous groups.

Many people ask if these deals were signed in good faith. That's a very good question. Not all treaties were negotiated in the same contexts. For instance, the deal signed as Treaty One in 1871 occurred under circumstances very different from the later numbered treaties. In 1871, the majority of the population in Western Canada was still First Nations. First Nations people were still a vital part of the economy, and the ravages of disease had not yet played the role they soon would. Promises were made to First Nations people who sought to build happy, healthy, vibrant communities, thus, moving into the future as partners with Canada. However, the question is: Were the spirit and intent of the treaties' terms that were written into the contracts in English the same as those negotiated and understood in sacred ceremony between both signatories (who met face-to-face and often communicated through translators)? This question is unlikely to ever be answered to everyone's satisfaction. However, it is necessary to ask another question before moving forward. If these legal agreements created the framework for Canada, and for the possibility of culturally distinct communities that were happy, healthy, and vibrant, why did we end up where we are today?

The Canada of today is a place where too many Indigenous citizens struggle with adverse economic, social, and legal conditions – some of the same conditions from which refugees to Canada flee. In Canada today, Indigenous youth experience poverty at a rate greater than three times that of non-Indigenous children; 90 percent of children in care come from Indigenous families in some areas; the suicide rate for Indigenous youth is from four to eight times the national average; Indigenous youth are three times more likely to be the victims of crime; more than 1200 missing and murdered women have created a national crisis. Yet, many non-Indigenous Canadians still have no idea what their obligations are under the treaties, and many view First Nations people and their issues as a burden.

## The Indian Act

The Indian Act, a unilaterally passed piece of legislation enacted in 1876 after the first numbered treaties were signed, has left a lasting impact on all Canadians.

Cindy Blackstock, a well-known Canadian scholar and activist, reminds us that Canada is the last Western industrialized nation to enforce federal race-based laws based upon blood quantum (Vowel 2016). What this means is that we collectively share a national identity where it will be impossible for many of our citizens to flourish and reach their potential as should rightly be their birthright in a country capable of so much more in terms of equity and opportunity. A full explanation and exploration of the Indian Act and its effects would be impossible here, though it will be necessary for all Canadians to become functionally aware of the damage it has created. For our purposes, let us suffice to say that the impact of the Indian Act cannot be overstated: it has undermined and affected every aspect of First Nations life in Canada since its inception shortly after the signing of the treaties.

The Indian Act dictates who is and who is not a legal Indian (Status Indian), and who is, therefore, entitled to treaty rights. The consequence of this is that, for generations, First Nations communities have been denied the right to determine who is and who is not part of their communities. The Indian Act has denied First Nations people title to the lands they live on, guaranteeing that it would be impossible to grow equity or capital on reserves. It has created separate and inferior healthcare, education, and child-welfare systems, all of which are essential for social, economic, and political well-being. It has denied First Nations people the right to leave their communities during times of sickness and poverty and has saddled communities with destabilized governance structures that are also woefully underfunded.

Perhaps the most egregious offense of the Indian Act was the creation and enforcement of a mandatory Indian Residential School system for First Nations children. This legacy saw more than 150,000 children taken away from their families and placed in schools administered by churches, destroying communities, identity, family ties, and, often, hope. Children who attended the residential schools suffered physical, emotional, sexual, and psychological abuse. At least 3201 children are known to have died at the schools. Evidence now suggests the full number may never be known, as children's bodies were buried in unmarked graves, and in some cases, in mass graves. Worse yet, some of these deaths were intentional – either due to severe beatings or deliberate exposure to disease and starvation (Fontaine, Craft, and The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015; Mosby 2013).

## The Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The legacy of the residential schools is a long and dark one. Unfortunately, Canada has many examples of racial and cultural mistreatments, but the forcible removal of children from their families into such horrific conditions is perhaps the most disturbing example of cultural genocide in Canadian history.

More than 130 residential schools existed in the period from 1870 to 1996 (INAC). This experience of abuse, and of separation from family and culture, has had lasting, intergenerational effects. Children returned to their home

communities traumatized by the abuse they had endured, ashamed of their culture, and not having had the experience of healthy parenting. They re-entered communities saddled by the Indian Act, which meant they could not own land, could not work, and were living on land that was not agriculturally productive – nor were communities near any resources that would allow for economic viability. Indigenous people required permission of the Indian agent – a government representative for the district – to leave the reserve, which was rarely granted. They faced racism and violence in towns and cities surrounding them if they did leave. Schools on reserve, funded federally according to the Indian Act, are estimated to receive 30 percent less per-student funding than off-reserve public schools receive (Drummond and Rosenbluth 2013). To this day, Indigenous students attend elementary schools that are chronically underfunded. Many schools have no computers or libraries, may lack heat or running water, and are staffed by uncertified teachers. After years of poor educational experiences, students are then expected to go to high schools off reserve and keep up with students from the town or city nearby.

The systemic racism of this legacy dooms too many Indigenous youth to a life of struggle that few manage to triumph over. To begin a healing process, with the support of the Assembly of First Nations and Inuit organizations, former residential-school students took the federal government and the churches to court. The settlement achieved as a result of this case was the largest class-action settlement in Canadian history. The agreement included financial compensation for survivors, and called for the establishment of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

The commission that was struck to gather information, record the stories of survivors, and make recommendations for healing shouldered a heavy burden of history and travelled a difficult journey. Listening to the stories of survivors took a toll on committee members, as Commission Chair Justice Murray Sinclair made clear when he said: "This has been a difficult, inspiring and painful journey... These were heartbreaking, tragic, and shocking accounts of discrimination, of deprivation, and all manners of physical, sexual, emotional and mental abuse."

For those involved, working on the TRC was both a labour of love and a test of resilience. Listening to the horror stories of people's experiences in the residential schools, and encountering constant racism and barriers to the process, required a heroic level of determination and care. To emerge from such an endeavour with a message of peace and healing, rather than anger and revenge, takes a highly developed spiritual essence.

The 94 Calls to Action that came out of the TRC are a road map to reconciliation.[4] Each recommendation represents a vital opportunity to redefine, reverse, or rewrite damaging aspects of the Indian Act. At the very least, the Calls to Action provide a basis to educate Canadians about what life in a Treaty country should look like in the future.

4 See <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf.>

It would be absurd to suggest that the damages created by the Indian Act haven't been most dramatic in First Nations communities; however, we are all living with the wreckage of colonialism. We all live with the social challenges created by the Indian Act. A society cannot be fully healthy, or reach its full potential, when certain citizens are denied rights and privileges on the basis of race and ethnicity. We have all been affected by the experiences of poverty in our communities, by soaring healthcare rates, and by concerns originating out of social inequity, crime rates, and abysmal education rates (it is estimated that as few as 30 percent of First Nations children coming from reserve will graduate from high school). So, too, have we all been affected by the suffering of our fellow Canadians (Richards 2014).

As well, many of us hear racial insults, jokes, and hurtful comments on a daily basis – perhaps not on the level of overt discrimination but on a much more pervasive and insidious level that some refer to as "micro-aggression" (Clark et al. 2014). Much of that racism originates from Canadians who have witnessed the wreckage of the Indian Act all around them and are horrified by it, but lack the education and awareness to understand the source and cause of what they are seeing. Justice Murray Sinclair once pointed out that while First Nations children were sitting in residential schools learning that their culture had no value or place in the modern world, the rest of Canadian children were receiving the same message about Indigenous people. This message was embedded into curricula, textbooks, lesson plans, and family conversations. In Canada, that ignorance has been passed down from one generation to the next and is nurtured by the "us vs. them" politics of the Indian Act.

| Effects on Indigenous People | Effects on Non-Indigenous People |
|---|---|
| • Systemic racism<br>• Marginalization and discrimination experienced by minorities<br>• Effects of poverty on learning<br>• Trauma, persecution<br>• Impacts of the Indian Act<br>• Watching the wounds imposed on Mother Nature | • Emotional consequences of carrying systemic racism<br>• Guilt, shame, denial, animosity<br>• Thirst for healing<br>• Effects of poverty – crime, stress, addiction, mental health<br>• Trauma of fearing the other, of seeing suffering |

**Figure 3.2.** Recognizing the Shared Effects of Canada's Colonial History

The broken relationship between Canada's Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples affects our children, not only in the economic and social sense, but in their education, as well. When Indigenous students struggle within our schools, non-Indigenous students bear daily witness to the suffering, frustration, and failures their classmates' experience. Resources and teacher time are spent dealing with problems, rather than with creating success. From a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) perspective, all of our students affect the community of care we are seeking to create, and what benefits some affects all. Unfortunately, what hurts some affects all, as well.

## The Role of Schools and Teachers in Reconciliation

> Education played a huge role in getting us into this mess, and education must play a huge role in helping us get out of it.– *Marie Wilson, member of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*

As we think about reconciliation, we must ask ourselves two important questions:

1. Why are these Calls to Action being asked of us?
2. Would our communities and nation be better or worse off if these Calls to Action were fulfilled?

Much harm was done in the name of education, teachers, and schools. While today's teachers did not participate in that harm, we can be part of the healing.

While today's teachers did not participate in that harm, we can be part of the healing.

However, for many teachers, talking about Indigenous issues can be overwhelming. The collective term *Indigenous* refers to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people in Canada. But there are hundreds of First Nations, each with its own culture and history. Teachers fear making mistakes in bringing forward the perspectives of a culture and people that is not their own. Many teachers may also be learning about residential schools for the first time, even though they may see the impact of it every day, and feel unqualified to share these difficult stories of Canadian colonialism with their students. We acknowledge all of these barriers as fair and legitimate, but also want to encourage teachers to overcome them. To not do so is to perpetuate the silence and ignorance of non-Indigenous people for yet another generation. We encourage all teachers to educate themselves as much as they can; to seek out and connect with Elders who can support their own and their students' learning; to find resources related to Indigenous worldviews, treaties, subject-specific content, and residential schools; and to be willing to learn alongside their students in an open-minded way. We teach about ancient Egypt – and we weren't there, either!

Statistically, Indigenous students struggle academically more than their non-Indigenous peers. Today's Indigenous students may be intergenerational survivors – another legacy of residential schools. The TRC often heard survivors say their biggest regret was how their experiences affected how they raised their own children. Some parents – having no experience of child rearing in their own cultures – only knew how to parent using harsh discipline. Some did not know how to create a nurturing environment. Some abused alcohol or drugs to cope with the trauma of their residential-school experiences. We don't yet know the epigenetic impact of the residential schools, but it most likely influences students' experiences of schools and schooling.

Reconciliation in schools means educating for change, equity in education, and reclaiming identity for Indigenous students and for all Canadians. In bringing us together, reconciliation enriches the lives of all of us.

## Education as a Way Forward

Educators have a particularly significant role to play in two of the TRC's Calls to Action:

62. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:
    - Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.
    - Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.
    - Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.
    - Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.
63. We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:
    - **Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.**
    - **Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.**
    - **Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.**
    - Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above

In particular, the first three sub-points under point 63, emphasized above, rely on teachers.

While some teachers may not feel capable of developing the curriculum, we must all take part in implementing it. The only way forward is to learn about each other, about both the gifts and the mistakes of the past, in a mutually beneficial way. Resources are being developed across the country, and many are available online. There are also many novels, picture books, and videos teachers can use (see appendix A). Make it a fun, collaborative endeavour at your school! Although some of the content is difficult, the ultimate message is of the final point in the highlighted list above – creating a world of intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect. What greater purpose is there for us as a profession?

Remember the second of our two questions: Would our communities and nation be better or worse off if these Calls to Action were fulfilled?