



From 'Decolonized' to Reconciliation Research in Canada: Drawing from Indigenous Research Paradigms

Deborah McGregor

Osgoode Hall Law School, York University
dmcgregor@osgoode.yorku.ca

Abstract

When the Honorable Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was asked the one message that non-Aboriginal Canadians can learn from the work of the TRC, he said “put the relationship back into balance”. Sinclair stressed that in order to achieve reconciliation and facilitate balance in the relationship we need to change the way non-Aboriginal people are educated about Aboriginal peoples. Justice Sinclair also stated that racism and colonialism are firmly embedded structurally, systemically and institutionally in Canada. This has to change. This paper will explore how the findings from the TRC can transform the theory and practice of reconciliation research in Canada. How can the academy respond appropriately and meaningfully to the TRC recommendations? This paper proposes that reconciliation research agendas should draw upon Indigenous research paradigms which privilege Indigenous worldviews, epistemologies, and knowledges as productive elements in the way forward.

Keywords

Indigenous research; reconciliation; truth and reconciliation commission

Introduction: Understanding (Studying) the Problem

For much of our history, all Canadian children—Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike—were taught that Aboriginal people were inferior, savage, and uncivilized, and that Aboriginal languages, spiritual beliefs, and ways of life were irrelevant. Aboriginal people were depicted as having been a dying race, saved from destruction by the intervention of humanitarian Europeans. Since little that was taught about Aboriginal people was positive, the system led non-Aboriginal people to believe they were inherently superior. (TRC 2012, p. 3-4).

In Canada there have been numerous Indigenous public commissions and inquiries established to address the problems faced by Indigenous peoples. These public inquiries covered a range of topic areas and ultimately sought ways to achieve justice. One of the most significant public commissions was the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). Established in 1991, the RCAP's primary mandate was to examine the question "What are the foundations of a fair and honorable relationship between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people of Canada?" (RCAP 1996, x). The final report (five volumes, 4000 pages and over 440 recommendations) was released in 1996 and its primary conclusion was that, "The main policy direction [i.e., the assimilation of Aboriginal culture], pursued for more than 150 years, first by colonial then by Canadian governments, has been wrong" (RCAP 1996, x). The RCAP is now two decades old and although many of the challenges described in the reports and subsequent recommendations remain unresolved and unfulfilled, RCAP did reveal that the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples is "distorted" and that this distortion has had devastating and terrible consequences for Aboriginal peoples (RCAP 1996).

In response to RCAP's findings and the subsequent attention paid to the harmful legacy of residential schools in particular, in 1998, Jane Stewart (Minister of Indian and Northern Development at the time) delivered the "Statement of Reconciliation: Learning from the Past" document, in which the government recognized the harm caused to Aboriginal peoples, their families, communities and societies by the residential school system (INAC 2010a). Subsequent to this, the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) was announced in 2006. As an agreement between the Government of Canada and the approximately 86,000 Aboriginal people who attended residential schools, the IRSSA represents the largest class action settlement in Canadian history and recognizes the harm that was inflicted upon the children who were removed from their families and communities.

On June 11, 2008, then Prime Minister Stephen Harper finally apologized on behalf of the Government of Canada for the residential schools system and the harm it caused to Aboriginal peoples (INAC 2010b). In addition, and as part of the IRSSA, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was

established in 2008 under the terms of the IRSSA (AFN 2013). The mandate of the TRC was to:

- reveal to Canadians the complex truth about the history and the ongoing legacy of the church-run residential schools, in a manner that fully documents the individual and collective harms perpetrated against Aboriginal peoples, and honours the resilience and courage of former students, their families, and communities; and
- guide and inspire a process of truth and healing, leading toward reconciliation within Aboriginal families, and between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal communities, churches, governments, and Canadians generally. The process was to work to renew relationships on a basis of inclusion, mutual understanding, and respect. (TRC 2015a, 27)

After a challenging start and the resignation of the original three commissioners, three replacement commissioners were appointed in 2009: Justice Murray Sinclair (Chair), Chief Wilton Littlechild, and Dr. Marie Wilson. The results of their daunting task have been followed up by the establishment in 2015 of a National Center for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR). The Center's purpose is to house TRC-related materials for public education and research. Currently hosted by the University of Manitoba, it aims at supporting further research efforts to ensure that:

- survivors and their families have access to their own history;
- educators can share the residential school history with new generations of students;
- researchers can delve more deeply into the residential school experience and legacy;
- the public can access historical records and other materials to help foster reconciliation and healing; and
- the history and legacy of the residential school system are never forgotten. (TRC 2015a, 37)

The RCAP was not the first instance in which the residential school experience was studied at length. The residential school system has been the topic of scholarly research for decades (Furniss 1995, Haig-Brown 1998, Miller 1996, Regan 2010). The TRC distinguished itself by engaging with over 7,000 survivors, whose voices were otherwise largely missing from the historical record. Indigenous knowledge, ceremonies and meticulous attention to Indigenous protocols were observed by the TRC in its work, setting a high standard for future endeavours of such a sensitive and political nature.

The process undertaken by the TRC required adherence to the highest ethical standards and observance of varied Indigenous protocols. A variety of risks associated with participating in the process had to be addressed. Asking survivors

to relate detailed truths of their experiences, for example, involved the very real potential for re-traumatizing those survivors. Some of the strategies employed by the TRC may serve as a model which could be utilized to inform future academic ‘decolonizing’ research. In addition to the 94 recommendations set out by the TRC, the NCTR will utilize its collection of assembled resources to assist in guiding a variety of future research endeavours.

Can the example of the TRC and its recommendations change what Canada knows of Indigenous peoples? Can the TRC, through education, offer an opportunity to systemically alter the way research is conducted in relation to Indigenous peoples in this country? The purpose of the TRC was not to ‘decolonize’ research per se, yet in a way the TRC’s recommendations did seek to deconstruct the highly colonial relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. This paper will not describe the TRC process as such (see instead www.trc.ca), but will explore how the TRC’s findings might be applied in transforming the theory and practice of academic research in relation to Indigenous peoples. It will address questions such as: How can the academy respond appropriately and meaningfully to the TRC’s recommendations? What spaces for improved Indigenous research currently exist in post-secondary institutions upon which we can build? What are key challenges to be faced in this process? How can such challenges be overcome?

Cultural Genocide: Getting Rid of the “Indian Problem”

After seven years of listening to the experiences of residential school survivors, and combing through thousands of pages of documents, the TRC found that Canada remains structurally, systemically and institutionally racist and colonial. Systemically, the child welfare, education, health and justice systems have failed Aboriginal peoples profoundly. The TRC found that:

The closing of the schools did not bring the residential school story to an end. Their legacy continues to this day. It is reflected in the significant disparities in education, income, and health between Aboriginal people and other Canadians—disparities that condemn many Aboriginal people to shorter, poorer, and more troubled lives. The legacy is also reflected in the intense racism and the systemic discrimination Aboriginal people regularly experience in this country....The beliefs and attitudes that were used to justify the establishment of residential schools are not things of the past: they continue to animate official Aboriginal policy today. (TRC 2015b, 103-104)

These findings are similar to those issued by RCAP two decades earlier, as noted above. The TRC found the residential school system was implemented within the context of other coherent “Aboriginal policies”, of the original colonial and later Canadian governments, whose clear intent in this regard was the *cultural*

genocide of Indigenous peoples in Canada, in order to obtain lands and resources and get rid of the “Indian problem”. The TRC (2015a, 1) reached its stark conclusion on Canada’s efforts in this regard as follows, beginning by defining cultural genocide as:

...the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group. Land is seized, and populations are forcibly transferred and their movement is restricted. Languages are banned. Spiritual leaders are persecuted, spiritual practices are forbidden, and objects of spiritual value are confiscated and destroyed. And, most significantly to the issue at hand, families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next.

In its dealing with Aboriginal people, Canada did all these things.

Furthermore, the TRC found that “The Canadian government pursued this policy of cultural genocide because it wished to divest itself of its legal and financial obligations to Aboriginal people and gain control over their land and resources. If every Aboriginal person were “absorbed into the body politic,” there would be no reserves, no Treaties, and no Aboriginal rights (TRC 2015b, 6).

These findings are neither very comforting nor very surprising if you are an Indigenous person in Canada. To non-Indigenous citizens, the above statement may seem rather chilling, particularly living in a country that prides itself on openness and tolerance. Yet there is no doubt that attempts at cultural genocide have been ongoing for generations, and that, as elsewhere, this was predicated on so-called “existing knowledge” which showed that Indigenous peoples were inferior, “savage” and in need of civilization (TRC 2012), along with an overwhelming desire to obtain Indigenous resources. As part of this process, the residential school system was based on an assumption that European civilization and Christian religions were superior to Aboriginal culture and spirituality, which was seen as being savage and brutal (TRC 2015, 5). Unfortunately, as Indigenous scholars have pointed out, such views were supported by research conducted by non-Indigenous peoples (Kovach 2009, Smith 1999, Tuck 2009). Kovach writes:

In the colonization of Indigenous people, science was used to support an ideological and racist justification for subjecting Indigenous cultures and ways of knowing....The racism inherent in this evolutionary paradigm contributed to the genocidal policy towards Aboriginal peoples in the Americas. (Kovach 2009, 77)

It is true that some researchers claimed to be documenting and preserving the knowledge/language of vanishing peoples, but even these efforts proved harmful in their execution (Geniusz 2009).

There are many reasons for the racist and discriminatory attitudes directed toward Indigenous peoples, among which ignorance of Indigenous peoples and their realities is clearly prominent. Such attitudes, codified in law (*Indian Act*), policies ('civilization' and assimilation) and various practices, were intended to get rid of the 'Indian problem' by literally ridding Canada of the Indian. This ignorance was further fostered by scholarship that portrayed Indigenous peoples as a 'vanishing race' (Cole 1985), or as unfortunate victims of progress (Bodley 2008), or in need of assistance from the dominant race to civilize. Indigenous scholar Charles Menzies observes that "Research also means studying us, criticizing us, and ultimately ranking us in a hierarchical chain of development from savages to Eurocentric civilization" (Menzies 2013, 191). Eve Tuck expresses a similar view: "so many outsiders benefit from depicting communities as damaged" (Tuck 2009, 412). As the TRC noted, "Underlying these arguments was the belief that the colonizers were bringing civilization to savage people who could never civilize themselves" (TRC 2015b, 18).

As Sami scholar Rauna Koukanen (2007, 6) writes in her book, *Reshaping the University: Responsibility, Indigenous Epistememes, and the Logic of the Gift*, "Indifference and lack of understanding are indications that systemic racism exists" in academia. As such, the continued ignorance of Indigenous cultures and the conflicts they have endured is wilful, and in terms of research has meant the general exclusion of Indigenous voice in nearly all instances. Indigenous peoples have instead been viewed almost exclusively as research 'objects': participants and informants, but not as research leaders. Menzies, reflecting on his experience as an Indigenous anthropologist, calls for researchers "to stop using Indigenous peoples as a laboratory to test non-Indigenous theories and methods" (p.187). This long-standing government-sanctioned ethos continues to permeate every aspect of Canadian society:

Too many Canadians know little or nothing about the deep historical roots of these conflicts. This lack of historical knowledge has serious consequences for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, and for Canada as a whole. In government circles, it makes for poor public policy decisions. In the public realm, it reinforces racist attitudes and fuels civic distrust between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians. (TRC 2015b, 114)

It might be reasonable to assume, given how Indigenous peoples have been 'researched' for centuries now on every imaginable topic, that the general ignorance of Indigenous peoples and cultures would not persist in academia and education the way it has among the general public. This is unfortunately not the case. In fact, research has contributed extensively to the oppression and marginalisation of Indigenous peoples (Smith 1999). Consider the following example:

In 2013, Dr. Ian Mosby, post-doctoral fellow and food historian at the University of Guelph, published a paper entitled *Administering Colonial Science: Nutrition Research and Human Medical Experimentation in Aboriginal Communities and Residential Schools, 1942-1952*. The paper reports how, for over a decade, government-sanctioned 'nutritional studies' were conducted in residential schools in Ontario and Manitoba. During these studies, children, as "controls", "...[were] being fed, for anywhere between two and five years, diets known to be nutritionally inadequate or, ...[were] being actively denied certain types of dental care for the duration of the study" (p. 165). These studies were actually controlled experiments conducted by Canada's leading nutrition experts at the time in cooperation with Indian Affairs, but without the informed consent or even knowledge of the highly vulnerable subjects (primarily malnourished Indigenous children) and their parents. One such study was led by Tisdall Moore, a leading nutrition expert with Indian Affairs, in collaboration with University of Toronto anthropologist Gordon Brown. Mosby writes (p. 148):

...during the war and early postwar period – bureaucrats, doctors, and scientists recognized the problems of hunger and malnutrition, yet increasingly came to view Aboriginal bodies as "experimental materials" and residential schools and Aboriginal communities as kinds of "laboratories" that they could use to pursue a number of different political and professional interests. Nutrition experts, for their part, were provided with the rare opportunity to observe the effects of nutritional interventions (and non-interventions, as it turned out) on human subjects while, for Moore and others within the Indian Affairs and Indian Health Services bureaucracy, nutrition offered a new explanation for – and novel solutions to – the so-called "Indian Problems" of susceptibility to disease and economic dependency.

According to Mosby, this research was pursued in part because it suggested the heart of the "Indian problem" lay within Aboriginal people themselves, and that modern, scientific medical care was needed to take care of this problem. This in turn was all part of a broader drive to civilize and assimilate Indigenous peoples. He explains that (p.153):

...addressing the problems of poor health and malnutrition in Aboriginal communities was not only essential to protecting the white population from Indian "reservoirs" and "vectors" of diseases like tuberculosis – language that became a central justification of the work of Indian Health Services. It was also necessary to fulfil the longer-term goal of integrating and assimilating Aboriginal peoples

into the Canadian population. The preferred solution was intervention by non-Aboriginal experts like doctors, dieticians, and social workers.

In the end, Mosby concludes that, although the studies seem to have advanced the careers of many non-Indigenous researchers, they did nothing to change the structural conditions that led to the malnutrition of Indigenous children. Rather, Mosby points out that although the stated goal was to address the problem of malnutrition in residential schools, the underlying intent was to study the “Indian problem”. He concludes by saying (p. 172):

These experiments therefore must be remembered and recognized for what they truly were: one among many examples of a larger institutionalized and, ultimately, dehumanizing colonialist racial ideology that has governed Canada’s policies towards and treatment of Aboriginal peoples throughout the twentieth century.

However incredible and terribly wrong such studies may seem to us, it is easy for the reader to decide that such things, although they occurred not very long ago, nevertheless occurred ‘in the past’, and would not be tolerated in the present day. Disturbingly, numerous authors argue that modern research into Indigenous peoples has not changed nearly as much as might be hoped. Cree scholar Margaret Kovach, in her work *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (2009), states that current research has indeed not changed much at all, but “...has simply shape-shifted to fit the contemporary context” (p. 76). She writes (p. 28):

From an Indigenous perspective, the reproduction of colonial relationships persists inside institutional centers. It manifests itself in a variety of ways, most noticeably through western based policies and practices that govern research, and less explicitly through the cultural capital necessary to survive there. The result has been, and continues to be, that Indigenous communities are examined by non-Indigenous academics who pursue western research, on western terms. While we may currently be in a more inclusive moment of qualitative research, Indigenous communities are still being ‘researched,’ albeit with more political finesse.

Anaya (2014) asks the related question of why, if (as governments have repeatedly stated) so much research is conducted to “benefit the Indian”, does ignorance prevail and quality of life outcomes remain tragically low for Indigenous peoples across Canada? Unacceptable conditions remain and horrific violence against Indigenous peoples continues throughout this country (Ambler 2014, NWAC 2010). Clearly, the so-called “Indian problem” has never been a problem of Indigenous peoples at all, but one of how they are viewed by non-Indigenous society.

Recognizing this, it then seems reasonable to ask how, given all the progress that *has* been made in Canada and numerous countries around the world in our understanding of racism and how to combat it, can this morally wrong and entirely counterproductive view of Indigenous peoples in Canada have persisted for so long? Kuokkanen (2007) offers some insight into this question. She states that, "...anti-racism discourse has taught us that racism is not limited to individual or overt acts; it also operates -and much more effectively- at the level of structures, and to the extent this is so, it becomes naturalized" (p. 6). This racism has thus become "rooted in underlying power structures" (p. 6). As long as the culture of these power structures remains unchanged, the racism will continue. The question then becomes: "How might the culture of racism within these structures be eradicated, and replaced with cultures of inclusion and respect?"

Menzies refers to the persistence of structural inequity and privilege as "colonial folklore", and points out that "dislodging colonial folklore...and dislodging privilege would involve more than good quality education, engaged teaching, or balanced academic writing" (p.188). The reluctance to relinquish power and privilege in academia exists among the "enlightened" in academia. Critical consciousness (of colonization) can act as a "diversion, distraction, which relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility, and conceal the need to give up land or power or privilege" (Tuck and Yang 2012, 21).

We must therefore begin to discuss the concept of 'decolonizing' conventional power structures, focussing particularly on decolonizing research methodologies.

'Decolonizing' Indigenous Research

Research is not neutral. Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, in *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999), observes that "In other words, research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions" (Smith 1999, 5). A first step in moving beyond current, one-sided, research methods is to develop 'decolonizing methodologies' which aim to unpack the impact of colonization on a very fundamental level - basic humanity. Smith observes that Indigenous peoples are often the most impoverished in society and are:

...constantly fed messages about their worthlessness, laziness, dependence and lack of 'higher' order qualities....the problem is that constant efforts by governments, states, societies and institutions to deny the historical formations of such conditions have simultaneously denied our claims to humanity, to having a history and to all sense of hope. (p.4)

To decolonize is to resist these forces of ongoing colonization and "remake" ourselves as Indigenous peoples (Laenui 2000). Colonized research that

continues to marginalize Indigenous peoples, epistemology and knowledges within research processes reproduces colonialism (Kovach 2009; Kuokkanen 2007). Decolonizing research means that “Indigenous peoples want to tell their own stories, write their own versions, in our own ways, for our own purposes” (Smith 1999, 28). Decolonizing research analyzes power differences and is necessary because colonial influences are persistent and pervasive. Decolonizing research approaches require constant attentiveness to colonial influences. The fact is, as Maori scholar Graham Smith observes, “I do not believe for an instant that we are in a post-colonial period. I do not think we have seen the last of colonialism; on the contrary, it is very much alive and well” (Smith 2000, 215).

Decolonizing research approaches and methodologies have had an impact on contemporary research involving Indigenous peoples, and will continue to do so by raising the observations and questions posed in the preceding pages. However, research that continues to present Indians as ‘the problem’ or Indians as ‘deficient’ or damaged (the ‘deficiency model’ of research), persists and continues to serve the centuries-old colonial agenda. Decolonizing such research is an important strategy, yet it has its limits as it continues to focus on the colonizer and colonization (by definition) (Smith 2000). Smith points out that in focussing on ‘decolonization’, Indigenous people will remain in “reactive mode”. Smith states that “The point here is the extent to which we are drawn into justifying ourselves to the dominant society. I believe that such a process puts the colonizer at the centre, and thereby we become co-opted into reproducing (albeit unintentionally) our own oppression” (p.210). He adds that, “In short, Maori are sick of justifying and explaining our needs and aspirations to Pakeha” (p. 211).

To truly ‘decolonize’ research, *Indigenous research* –research that is formulated from an Indigenous perspective (i.e., is based on Indigenous world view and Indigenous knowledge, and responds to Indigenous needs and inquiries) must begin to play a central role in a broad spectrum of research undertakings. Whereas the vast majority of research is currently defined through a Western science-based/biased lens, with Indigenous perspectives as occasional add-ons or afterthoughts, Indigenous theories and knowledge and world views must increasingly become a *starting point* for new research efforts. Tuck and Yang (2012) add that decolonization is more than a metaphor; it also involves repatriation of lands back to Indigenous peoples. Decolonization is not just a type of research endeavour centered on empowering Indigenous peoples in academia (or elsewhere), it also requires those in power to “dislodge” their power and privilege.

What decolonizing research did was create space for Indigenous methodologies to emerge and take shape. Subsequently, a whole body of scholarship has emerged that centers not merely on decolonizing research, but rather on Indigenous research (Archibald 2008; Debassige 2013; Louis 2007; McGregor & Plain 2014; Wilson 2008). What does such research look like, when Indigenous intellectual traditions form the basis of inquiry? What are likely to be the outcomes when Indigenous peoples set the research agenda, based on their

questions, needs and concerns? What does research look like when the inherent intelligence, strength and capacity of Indigenous peoples form the foundations and motivation for intellectual inquiry?

Indigenous research is not premised on colonial research methods. It moves beyond decolonizing research to bring forth Indigenous worldviews, epistemologies, ontologies, ethics, values, and intellectual traditions (Kovach 2009; Wilson 2008). Kovach (2009, 37) writes that:

Indigenous methods do not flow from western philosophies; they flow from tribal epistemologies. If tribal knowledges are not referenced as legitimate knowledge systems guiding Indigenous methods and protocols within the research process, there is a congruency problem. Furthermore, by not recognizing Indigenous inquiry for what it is -a distinctive methodology- the political and practical quagmire will persist.

Indigenous research offers a much broader lens, and asks critical questions about knowledge production, generation, mobilization, and who really benefits from the research.

The Role of Research in Facilitating Reconciliation

The most recent justice inquiry into the historical and present lives of Indigenous peoples –the TRC– makes explicit the requirement to re-interpret the “Indian problem” as a “Canadian problem” shared by all. It is no longer viable, if indeed it ever was, to ignore the inextricable relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada and their shared histories, present situations and future aspirations. For reconciliation to be achieved, a shared agenda for moving forward is necessary.

When the Honorable Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of the TRC, was asked to convey the one overriding message that non-Aboriginal Canadians should come away with from the work of his Commission, he highlighted the need to “...put the relationship back into balance” (TRC 2015b). More specifically, the TRC states that:

...“reconciliation” is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. In order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour. (p. 113)

Reconciliation must support Aboriginal peoples as they heal from the destructive legacies of colonization that have wreaked such havoc in their lives. But it must do even more. Reconciliation must

inspire Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to transform Canadian society so that our children and grandchildren can live together in dignity, peace, and prosperity on these lands we now share. (p. 114)

TRC Chair Justice Murray Sinclair stressed that in order to achieve reconciliation and balance in the relationship we need to change the way non-Aboriginal people are educated about Aboriginal peoples. Clearly putting much of the responsibility on educational institutions at all levels, Justice Sinclair also stated that racism and colonialism are firmly embedded systemically and institutionally in Canada. This has to change.

The TRC's findings, such as those expressed by Justice Sinclair, have far-reaching implications for post-secondary institutions, which are heavily invested in research, and which continue to train new generations of research scholars. The understanding these individuals have arrived at over the course of their studies in regards to Indigenous peoples will determine in large part the degree to which Indigenous research and indeed reconciliation as a whole is successful. It may even be appropriate to label the research needed from many of these individuals if Canada is to move forward on Indigenous issues as 'reconciliation research'.

The TRC offers substantial guidance as to the implementation of this reconciliation process, in part through the implementation of ten guiding principles (TRC 2015b, 3-4):

1. The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* is the framework for reconciliation at all levels and across all sectors of Canadian society.
2. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, as the original peoples of this country and as self-determining peoples, have Treaty, constitutional, and human rights that must be recognized and respected.
3. Reconciliation is a process of healing of relationships that requires public truth sharing, apology, and commemoration that acknowledge and redress past harms.
4. Reconciliation requires constructive action on addressing the ongoing legacies of colonialism that have had destructive impacts on Aboriginal peoples' education, cultures and languages, health, child welfare, the administration of justice, and economic opportunities and prosperity.
5. Reconciliation must create a more equitable and inclusive society by closing the gaps in social, health, and economic outcomes that exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.
6. All Canadians, as Treaty peoples, share responsibility for establishing and maintaining mutually respectful relationships.

7. The perspectives and understandings of Aboriginal Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers of the ethics, concepts, and practices of reconciliation are vital to long-term reconciliation.
8. Supporting Aboriginal peoples' cultural revitalization and integrating Indigenous knowledge systems, oral histories, laws, protocols, and connections to the land into the reconciliation process are essential.
9. Reconciliation requires political will, joint leadership, trust building, accountability, and transparency, as well as a substantial investment of resources.
10. Reconciliation requires sustained public education and dialogue, including youth engagement, about the history and legacy of residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal rights, as well as the historical and contemporary contributions of Aboriginal peoples to Canadian society.

Further to this, the TRC specifically highlights the importance of research to this process, in Recommendation 65 (TRC 2015c, 9):

1. Research is vital to reconciliation. It provides insights and practical examples of why and how educating Canadians about the diverse concepts, principles, and practices of reconciliation contributes to healing and transformative social change.
2. The benefits of research extend beyond addressing the legacy of residential schools. Research on the reconciliation process can inform how Canadian society can mitigate intercultural conflicts, strengthen civic trust, and build social capacity and practical skills for long-term reconciliation. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples have an especially strong contribution to make to this work.
3. Research partnerships between universities and communities or organizations are fruitful collaborations and can provide the necessary structure to document, analyze, and report research findings on reconciliation to a broader audience.

Continued and wilful ignorance of Indigenous peoples and issues is no longer viable, nor is the 'Indian problem' an appropriate construct. The problems that exist in Canada that impact Indigenous communities and peoples the hardest, are in fact 'problems', 'issues', and 'challenges' faced by all peoples in Canada, not just Aboriginal peoples. To focus only on Aboriginal peoples, and not simultaneously turn one's gaze on oneself and his/her society, remains a colonial act. *We need to ask fundamentally different sets of questions.*

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), a major government funding body in Canada, has responded to the TRC's call for reconciliation research. SSHRC President Ted Hewitt stated that "Social science and humanities scholars and their partners across the country are in a position to

facilitate access to knowledge in all of these areas – knowledge properly grounded in relations of respect, diversity and reciprocity between indigenous and academic communities” (Hewitt 2016). It is expected that many scholars will jump on this commitment, with the risk that some of them will produce still more research that continues to exploit Indigenous communities and knowledge. The time is thus ripe for advancing the terms and conditions for authentic and meaningful “reconciliation research”. How can research institutions respond to this vision, whereby Indigenous and reconciliation research play a central role in the broader reconciliation process? The following suggestions are not exhaustive, yet they represent a place from which to begin dialogue, a way to initiate relationships built on trust.

Suggestions for Supporting ‘Reconciliation Research’

1. Recognize and reconceptualize the ‘Indian Problem’ as a Canadian Problem

The Honorable Justice Murray Sinclair has stated repeatedly that the findings of the TRC highlight problems which are not uniquely Indigenous: they are problems shared with Canada (and Canadians) based on a shared colonial history and a conflict-ridden present. Therefore, we must fundamentally challenge the fact that research continues to focus on “addressing the Indian Problem” or addressing the damage rather than recognizing that the challenges are faced by us all. The “Indian Problem” or the “Indian as a Problem” is a persistent yet fictional construct that continues to haunt Indigenous peoples. It is difficult to see a bright future when everywhere you turn your existence is understood and presented as a “problem”. Or as Tuck points out “...damage centered research involves social and historical contexts at the onset [but] the significance of these contexts is regularly submerged. Without the context of racism and colonization, all we’re left with is the damage, and this makes our stories vulnerable to pathologizing analyses (p.415). The TRC consistently challenged this prevailing myth and generated a narrative that puts responsibility for change squarely on the shoulders of all Canadians.

2. Critically Assess the Existing Body of Knowledge

When the RCAP developed its expansive research agenda, particular attention was paid to the application of ethical guidelines to any research undertaken in support of the commission’s work. Of critical and unusual importance was the realization that previous research could frequently not be relied on for guidance in this area. When it came to Indigenous research, it would be necessary NOT to replicate many aspects of previous work rather than build directly upon it as normally happens in research. This was explained by the RCAP (1993, 37) as follows:

In the past, research concerning Aboriginal peoples has usually been initiated outside the aboriginal community and carried out by non-

aboriginal personnel. Aboriginal peoples have had almost no opportunity to correct misinformation or to challenge ethnocentric and racist interpretations. Consequently, the existing body of research, which normally provides a reference point for new research, must be open to reassessment.

In other words, what is currently “known” about Indigenous peoples must be critically evaluated and examined. As well, the research paradigm must shift from “studying” Indigenous peoples to relating to Indigenous peoples in a respectful, equitable and mutually beneficial way (Kovach 2009). Society as a whole needs to come to a very different understanding of who Indigenous people are.

3. Enable Structural, Systemic and Institutional Change

Reconciliation research must challenge the existing power structures that continue to fan the flames of racism and colonialism. As institutes of higher learning, universities must meet this challenge head-on by engaging in decolonizing processes themselves. Furthermore, they must, first and foremost acknowledge and respect the Indigenous territories they literally sit on and ensure a viable and sustainable (i.e., commemorative and mutually beneficial, not merely token) Indigenous presence within their communities. They must acknowledge their shared colonial history with Indigenous peoples and how they have been implicated in the colonial past and present. Universities must in fact ensure they are not in any way reproducing colonial relations in their governance, administration, teaching, research or practices. Are Indigenous initiatives present, genuine and authentic? Are Indigenous peoples present and visible in governing structures? Are Indigenous peoples present in high level administration? Are Indigenous faculty, staff, students and visitors present? Fortunately there has been some evidence of change in this regard in some cases. For example, Lakehead University has appointed an Indigenous Vice-Provost and institutional change has occurred as a result. Lakehead now requires all students to take a course in Aboriginal history/studies. Some universities have signed MOU's with Indigenous communities and nations in the territories they stand on. These are positive initiatives, but the status quo in many institutions remains unaltered.

Efforts at structural, institutional and systemic change require more than developing Indigenous theories, methodologies and practices. However, the type (and process) of research can change in short order. There is no shortage of work to be done in this area, with over 400 recommendations from the RCAP still largely collecting dust on a shelf, and another 94 generated by the TRC alone, determinedly not simply to experience a similar fate.

4. Respectfully Engage with Indigenous Peoples

Universities are notorious for engaging with Indigenous peoples solely as ‘research subjects’ and participants, and even this most often through the effort of

individual researchers rather than by invitation of the university as a whole. Universities, except for a few that have developed more formal relationships through MOUs or committees, continue to ignore Indigenous communities and leadership (except when they want something, like a speaker or support for a research effort). Universities have failed consistently to engage with Indigenous peoples as *people*.

There appears to be a certain amount of fear on behalf of universities and other institutions of engaging with Indigenous peoples on terms other than the institutions' own. Indigenous ideas continue to be filtered through the lens of academia and rationalized through Western theory. In this paradigm of Indigenous engagement, the actual task of engaging in respectful relationships falls on the shoulders of individual faculty members, and sometimes even students (who are often Indigenous), who find themselves suddenly carrying a burden of responsibility as lone representatives of entire universities and Indigenous nations in what can sometimes be a politically delicate situation. Most universities have yet to take steps to lift this burden by developing relationships at multiple levels (administratively and in terms of governance) that enable dialogue and a mutually beneficial exchange of ideas among various representatives. They have not sufficiently altered their behaviours in relation to Indigenous peoples, despite physically standing on their territories. Increasingly in Canada, Universities have to varying degrees adopted the practice of acknowledging Indigenous peoples and their lands during various university occasions (e.g., graduations, meetings), yet concrete "actions" to support such acknowledgement have usually not been taken.

Universities must overcome their trepidation and begin to learn about and talk to the Indigenous nations and communities around them. It will be very challenging indeed to move forward on a path of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in the absence of dialogue with those same peoples.

5. Provide for Cultural Safety

Universities must ensure they provide culturally safe environments for Indigenous faculty, staff, students and visitors. Indigenous people in post-secondary institutions face challenges of epistemic violence and dominance. Many speak about their traumatizing experiences with persistent notions of white supremacy and privilege that have only served to foster alienation (Kovach 2009, Kuokkanen 2007, Menzies 2013). Cultural safety includes making space for ceremonies, traditions and other expressions of Indigenous worldview. Unfortunately, some universities have permitted lateral violence to fester. The Native Women's Association of Canada defines lateral violence as occurring when oppressed people "...become the oppressor and within the workplace or community they now direct abuse to people of their own gender, culture, sexuality, and profession. In other words, instead of directing their anger at the oppressor, these workplace or community aggressors now direct their anger at their own peers or community members" (NWAC 2011, 1). Some universities have failed time and

time again to ensure that Indigenous faculty, in particular women, feel safe in their places of work.

6. Reconciliation in Post-Secondary Institutions: A Call to Action

For reconciliation to thrive in the coming years, it will also be necessary for federal, provincial, and territorial governments, universities, and funding agencies to invest in and support new research on reconciliation. Over the course of the Commission's work, a wide range of research projects across the country have examined the meaning, concepts, and practices of reconciliation. Yet, there remains much to learn about the circumstances and conditions in which reconciliation either fails or flourishes. Equally important, there are rich insights into healing and reconciliation that emerge from the research process itself. (TRC 2015a, 292)

Universities must turn their gaze to their own institutions, question their motives deeply and assess their willingness to engage in reconciliation work. Such work will require universities to “let go” of some long standing ideas and practices and acknowledge their role in the continued colonization of Indigenous peoples. (Menziez 2013) First, they must recognize that universities are not the only sites of research excellence: Indigenous communities are creating their own institutions which are, or are becoming, sites of excellence in research and teaching. Kenjgewin Teg Educational Institute, for example, delivers a host of programs, including an Anishinaabemowin (Anishinaabe language) program, while Six Nations Polytechnic hosts an Indigenous Knowledge Center. Operating under a different model, some Indigenous centers of higher learning have partnered with mainstream universities: for example, Ryerson University offers a BA in Public Administration and Governance which is run as a partnership between Ryerson and the First Nations Technical Institute.

The dominant paradigm of *extracting* knowledge from Indigenous peoples, communities and organizations has to shift to one of *collaborating and partnering*. In this collaborative approach, knowledge remains within Indigenous communities, on their terms. Principles relating to ‘Ownership, Control, Access and Protection’ (OCAP) (Schnarch 2004), as well as concepts relating to intellectual sovereignty and self-determination, provide ethical guidance in this area. Such guidance is critical since, as has unfortunately been seen with past undertakings, recommendations set out by such entities as the TRC may create the potential for further exploitation to occur under the guise of reconciliation research.

There is no reason why universities, who are considerably far better funded than community-based Indigenous educational institutes, cannot partner and collaborate with these Indigenous organizations in key program areas. Such engagement will hopefully alleviate the desire to ‘extract’ from Indigenous communities.

For example, in TRC's Call to Action, Recommendation 14 states that:

We call upon the federal government to enact an Aboriginal Languages Act that incorporates the following principles:

- i. Aboriginal languages are a fundamental and valued element of Canadian culture and society, and there is an urgency to preserve them.
- ii. Aboriginal language rights are reinforced by the Treaties.
- iii. The federal government has a responsibility to provide sufficient funds for Aboriginal-language revitalization and preservation.
- iv. The preservation, revitalization, and strengthening of Aboriginal languages and cultures are best managed by Aboriginal people and communities.
- v. Funding for Aboriginal language initiatives must reflect the diversity of Aboriginal languages. (TRC 2015c, 2)

It stands to reason that, if community-based language programs already exist at the local level in the territories where languages are spoken and lived, universities could partner with Indigenous educational institutions and support such programming to deliver on the TRC language recommendations. It becomes unnecessary and perhaps even undesirable to compete with Indigenous organizations for limited education funding. Currently, most universities continue to cling fiercely to harmful practices of knowledge extradition, contributing to an ongoing 'brain drain' in Indigenous communities. Why not just work *with* Indigenous organizations so everyone can benefit?

Conclusion: Anishinaabewin Conference Series: A Progressive Example

The annual Anishinaabewin Conference, hosted by the Ojibway Cultural Foundation (<http://www.ojibweculture.ca/>), brings together a diverse group of Anishinaabe contributors to share Anishinaabek knowledge (Gkendaasowin) from various perspectives and disciplinary traditions (e.g., history, linguistics, language, art, anthropology, environmental studies) including perspectives rooted in community and Anishinaabe traditions (oral tradition, storytelling). The Anishinaabek who contribute to these proceedings are all scholars in their own right, although not all work in scholarly or academic environments. However, anyone can attend the conference itself and experience a few days of Anishinaabe protocol and ceremony, essential components of any gathering.

The Anishinaabewin conferences might be thought of as Anishinaabe scholarly conferences, as the most learned of the Anishinaabe lead and participate - Elders, Grandmothers, Grandfathers, traditional teachers, artists, singers, dancers, activists, community leaders, educators and storytellers - and share their knowledge among peers. These conferences provide space for critical evaluation of what has

been written about the Anishinaabek over the centuries, by mainly non-Indigenous peoples (e.g., religious scholars, historians, linguists, anthropologists, poets, government officials) (Geniusz 2009). The proceedings contribute to the growing body of knowledge of Anishinaabe Gkendaasowin generated by Anishinaabek themselves. The conferences and proceedings represent an initial step in ensuring Anishinaabe Gkendaasowin is more widely accessible in our own communities and among our own people for our own benefit. These proceedings represent a collective storytelling effort, speaking to the enduring and transformative nature of Anishinaabek intellectual traditions.

The conferences support multi-generational gatherings where knowledge can be shared, just as it has been for countless generations, thus helping to revitalize Anishinaabek nationhood. There have been various conference themes over the years, involving the revitalization of various forms of Anishinaabek intellectual and spiritual traditions through storytelling and research. Research, it can be argued, is another form of reclaiming our stories and knowledge through personal transformation in pursuit of knowledge (Doerfler et al., 2013). As Anishinaabek, we have our own worldviews, philosophies, epistemologies and forms of inquiry (i.e., research) that account for our relationships and existence in the world. The Anishinaabewin series represents the diversity of ways in which Anishinaabek are tackling the difficult, yet transformative, work of decolonizing the knowledge and information that for centuries others have written about us (King 2013). Contributors to the conferences and proceedings have dedicated their lives to honouring the knowledge given to us by our ancestors and by other beings to create new knowledge that will serve our nations now and into the future.

Anishinaabek research can also be referred to as Biskaabiiyang (returning to ourselves), as described by Wendy Geniusz (2009). Over the years, many distinguished Anishinaabek have shared their knowledge in various contexts: whether in classrooms, courtrooms, political assemblies, or conference halls; at rallies or community functions; on the land or in ceremony. During each talk or teaching, Anishinaabek theoretical and research frameworks are used to describe the work that we do in our communities or in our workplaces to improve the lives of Anishinaabek. We remain committed to our culture, traditions and our language, actively contributing to the growing body of Anishinaabe Gkendaasowin while recognizing that we face new challenges and must respond in ways that are relevant to present circumstances, including reconciling difficult relationships with others who benefit from the persistence of colonial research and practices.

The Anishinaabewin series represents a form of reconciliation research as it serves as a forum for revitalizing Anishinaabek Gkendaasowin, but also affirms Biskaabiiyang to support Anishinaabe self-determination. The center of knowledge generation, production and dissemination remains in the hands of community (through the Ojibway Cultural Foundation), yet publication of the conference proceedings ensures Anishinaabek Gkendaasowin is available and shared with all who choose to listen.

To achieve balance in the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada as outlined by the TRC, Indigenous nations must take action to realize our own aspirations. As Smith (2000) advocates, “We must reclaim our own lives in order to put our destinies in our own hands” (p. 211). If research institutions such as universities respond as well to our priorities, goals and needs, then reconciliation research will be enabled to serve its desired end.

References

- Ambler, S. (2014). *Invisible Women: A Call to Action. A Report on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Canada* (Rep.). Ottawa, ON: Speaker of the House of Commons. Retrieved from http://ywcacanada.ca/data/research_docs/00000359.pdf
- Anaya, J. (2014). The Situation of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Retrieved July 14, 2016, from <http://unsr.jamesanaya.org/country-reports/the-situation-of-indigenous-peoples-in-canada>
- Archibald, J. (2008). *Indigenous storywork: Educating the heart, mind, body, and spirit*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Assembly of First Nations (AFN). (2013). *Indian Residential Schools. AFN Annual Report 2013* (Rep.). Ottawa, ON: AFN. <http://www.afn.ca/en/policy-areas/indian-residential-schools>
- Bodley, J. H. (2008). *Victims of progress, 5th ed.* Lanham, MD: Alta Mira Press.
- Cole, D. (1985). *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.
- Debassige, B. (2013). Building on Conceptual Interpretations of Aboriginal Literacy in Anishinaabe Research: A Turtle Shaker Model. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 36(2), 4-33.
- Doerfler, J., Sinclair, N. J., & Stark, H. K. (2013). *Centering Anishinaabeg studies: Understanding the world through stories*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.
- Furniss, E. (1995). *Victims of benevolence: The dark legacy of the Williams Lake residential school*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press.
- Geniusz, W. D. (2009). *Our knowledge is not primitive: Decolonizing botanical Anishinaabe teachings*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Haig-Brown, C. (1998). *Resistance and renewal: Surviving the Indian residential school*. Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press.
- Hewitt, T. (2016). Canada’s researchers eager to support truth and reconciliation efforts. University Affairs. <http://www.universityaffairs.ca/opinion/in-my-opinion/canadas-researchers-eager-to-support-truth-and-reconciliation-efforts/>

- King, C. O. (2013). *Balancing two worlds: Jean-Baptiste Assiginack and the Odawa Nation, 1768-1866*. Saskatoon, SK: Fastprint.
- Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations and contexts*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. (2010a). Address by the Honourable Jane Stewart, Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Development on the occasion of the unveiling of Gathering Strength-Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan. <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015725/1100100015726>
- Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (2010b). Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Statement of Apology to former Students of Indian Residential Schools. <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015644/1100100015649>
- Kuokkanen, R. J. (2007). *Reshaping the university: Responsibility, indigenous epistemes, and the logic of the gift*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Laenui, P. (2000). Processes of Decolonization. In, Marie Battiste (ed). *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press. pp. 150-160.
- Louis, R. (2007). Can You Hear us Now? Voices from the Margin: Using Indigenous Methodologies in Geographic Research. *Geographical Research* 45(2): 130-139.
- McGregor, D., and Plain, S. (2014). Anishinabe Research Theory and Practice: Place Based Research. In: Corbiere, Alan., Corbiere, Mary Ann, McGregor, Deborah, and Migwans, Crystal. (eds.). *Anishinaabewin Niiwin: Four Rising Winds*. M'Chigeeng: Ojibwe Cultural Foundation. pp. 93-114.
- Menzies, C. (2013). Standing on the Shore with Saaban: An Anthropological Rapprochement with an Indigenous Intellectual Tradition. *Collaborative Anthropologies* 6: 171-199.
- Miller, J. R. (1996). *Shingwauk's vision: A history of native residential schools*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Mosby, I. (2013). Administering Colonial Science: Nutrition Research and Human Medical Experimentation in Aboriginal Communities and Residential Schools, 1942-1952. *Histoire sociale / Social History* 46(91): 145-172.
- Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC). (2010). *What Their Stories Tell Us: Research Findings from the Sisters In Spirit Initiative*. Ottawa: Native Women's Association of Canada. http://www.nwac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/2010_What_Their_Stories_Tell_Us_Research_Findings_SIS_Initiative.pdf.
- Ojibway Cultural Foundation. <http://www.ojibweculture.ca/>

- Regan, P. (2010). *Unsettling the settler within: Indian residential schools, truth telling, and reconciliation in Canada*. Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press.
- Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. (1993). *Integrated Research Plan. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada.
- Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. (1996). *People to People, Nation to Nation: Highlights from the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada.
- Shnarch, B. (2004). Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP) or Self-Determination Applied to Research: A Critical Analysis of Contemporary First Nations Research and Some Options for First Nations Communities. *Journal of Aboriginal Health*, 1(1), 80-95. Retrieved from http://www.naho.ca/jah/english/jah01_01/journal_p80-95.pdf
- Smith, G. (2000). Protecting and Respecting Indigenous Knowledge. In M. Battiste (Ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision* (pp. 209-224). Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press.
- Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. New York, NY: Zed Books.
- TRC. (2012). *Canada, Aboriginal Peoples and the Residential School System: They Came For the Children*. Winnipeg, MB: Truth and Reconciliation Commission. www.trc.ca.
- TRC. (2015a). *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future. Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Winnipeg, MB: Truth and Reconciliation Commission. www.trc.ca.
- TRC. (2015b). *What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation*. Winnipeg, MB: Truth and Reconciliation Commission. www.trc.ca.
- TRC. (2015c). *Truth and Reconciliation Canada: Calls to Action*. Winnipeg, MB: Truth and Reconciliation Commission. www.trc.ca.
- Tuck, E. (2009). Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities. *Harvard Education Review* 79(3): 409-427.
- Tuck, E., and Yang, K.W. (2012). Decolonization is Not a Metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1(1): 1-40.
- Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Black Point, NS: Fernwood Pub.