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The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Insights into the Goal of Transformative Education

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The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Insights into the Goal of Transformative Education

Abstract

In 2006, the Government of Canada announced the approval of a final Residential Schools Settlement Agreement with the collaboration of the four churches responsible (United, Anglican, Presbyterian, Catholic), the federal government and residential school survivors. Schedule "N" of the Agreement lists the mandate of the TRC; therein, the TRC states one of its goals as: (d) to promote awareness and public education of Canadians about the system and its impacts. Can education - as the TRC hopes to engender - truly be transformative, renewing relationships and promoting healing in the process of forging these new relationships? The literature reviewed and the conferences attended highlighted that generating empathy may be a necessary ingredient for the instigation of social change, but is insufficient. Transformation through education, or reconciliation through truth-telling, testimonial reading and responsible listening would mean claiming a genuine, supportive responsibility for the colonial past. Educational policy and media initiatives are fundamental to creating awareness, developing public interest and support of the TRC's recommendations. However, authors also stress the importance of critical pedagogy in the whole process of truth and reconciliation, and that real reconciliation would require confronting the racism that initiated these institutions and allowed for a decontextualization of their impacts.

Keywords

TRC, Canada, Indigenous, public education, transformative education, testimonial reading

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Introduction

The residential school system was a colonial policy that operated for over one hundred years, with the last school closing in 1996.¹ Despite this fact, it is not uncommon to have conversations with people of varying ages that have never heard of this system. In 2006, the Government of Canada announced the approval of a final Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) in collaboration with four of the churches who operated residential schools (United, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Catholic), the federal government, and residential school survivors. The agreement provided for individual Common Experience Payments and an Independent Assessment Process, but also included collective measures such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC of Canada). Schedule "N"² of the Agreement lists the mandate of the TRC; therein, the TRC states one of its goals as: "(d) to promote awareness and public education of Canadians about the IRS system and its impacts". Also within this section, the TRC claims that reconciliation is a process that necessitates the commitment of all parties -Indigenous peoples, the government and all Canadians- to work toward a healthier future together, however that is defined. To go from a largely unaware public to a place of understanding (and widespread commitment to "healthy" relationships) is not so easily conceived. If "the residential school system is powerfully symbolic of the flawed relationship[s]" (Castellano et al., 2008, p. 404) between settlers and Indigenous peoples, and "the work of truth and reconciliation has at its core human relationships," (Erasmus, 2009, p. ix) then the TRC must conceptualize its role in relation to the necessity of transforming these relationships.

Part of a contemporary international trend, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission shares with similar initiatives the notion that a more inclusive citizenship, as well as reconciliation, can be achieved through truth-telling and subsequent public education about "past" injustices. This goal, which mainly speaks to a discourse on empathy, is supposed to produce a transformation in settler Canadians vis-à-vis Indigenous peoples. What would this goal require Canadians to do? When we confront *nationals*³ on the impacts of colonialism, who gets to feel bad and who is doing the transforming (Ahmed, 2005, p. 11)? What are the risks of empathy in the context of social change and reconciliation? Can Canadians be engaged in a "testimonial reading" ((Boler, 1997 p. 263) and listening of the TRC and its report? How does public education and desired transformations translate into actual social change? What are the consequences to any and all in this process? And finally, does the TRC and its mandate overshadow (as some would argue) more pressing issues around Indigenous rights (such as land claims) or citizenship (Indian status) and does its recovery discourse overlook the significance of regeneration, restitution and resurgence (Alfred, 2005, p.151)?

The foreword to Schedule "N" of the IRSSA, the TRC's mandate, describes how the TRC is part of an effort to put the "events of the past behind us." The mandate's authors state that the TRC is symbolic of the government's sincere interest in holistically addressing the impacts of the residential school system and forging respectful, lasting relationships with all the parties involved.

¹Gordon reserve residential school, Saskatchewan. Retrieved April 1, 2010 from <http://www.anglican.ca/rs/history/schools/gordons-school-punnichy.htm>

² Will be referred to as Sch."N." See Appendix (1).

³ Thobani (2007, p. 248) describes the *national subject* as one that is exalted to a "higher order of humanity" through a political process "organized by the juridical order and the institution of citizenship" and through the exclusion of Others.

They also suggest that truth-telling and sharing of common experiences with all Canadians will offer the route to reconciliation. Can education -as the TRC hopes to engender- truly be transformative, renewing relationships and promoting healing in the process of forging these new connections? This article seeks to unpack the aforementioned questions by problematizing the ideal of transformative education as exemplified in the TRC's mandate.

A potential lesson plan for the TRC

I shut my eyes tight and tried not to listen to what [Father Millar] was doing. It made me so sick to hear that, and Sarah, she didn't say a word, didn't make a sound, didn't even cry. I think he did that to her a lot. She was always sick, always in the dorm. She finally died too. That must have been a relief for her. She suffered so much (Jaine ed., 1993, p. 123).

The abuse that occurred behind the walls of the institutions that were the residential schools is certainly no secret. One need only to look at the form for the Independent Assessment Process to get an indication of some of the atrocities that involved students and staff. These included physical assault for speaking a native language, to sexually explicit comments, to rape. Children also had their hair cut off, symbolic of a severed cultural connection. They were malnourished, had to endure harsh physical labour, faced exposure to the elements from inadequate clothing, and were unable to speak to siblings or see family, in some cases for years. Although not all students went through the same experiences, or underwent the same degree of negativity, all were made to live in *fear* (Sinclair, 2009) and were disconnected from language, spiritual and cultural teachings, family, community, and a nurturing environment.

Public education for the TRC would require several components if it is truly to address the effects of the residential schools. It would need to include an examination of the motivations for implementing such a system, the workings of the system itself, and the implications this system has had on people today. This multi-faceted education would speak to the fact that this was a mandatory system with over 150,000 attendees (Legacy of Hope Foundation, 2010). It would outline the negative environment forced upon students, some below the minimum age for school attendance⁴. It is also pivotal to convey details on the generations of students that survived, as well as the nature and process of intergenerational trauma in its contributions to domestic violence, low self-esteem and depression, and negative life situations. A complex and layered public education is necessary for non-Indigenous peoples to grasp the severity of this colonial system's effect on entire Nations. Only such an educational framework could adequately describe a system that impacted every Indigenous person directly or indirectly, and where there remains an estimated 85,000 (Ibid.) survivors alive today dealing with these (for the most part unacknowledged) impacts by the Canadian public.

Awareness of the residential school system via the TRC is intended to target the whole of the Canadian public. As Beverly Jacobs (2008, p. 225) commented, "everyone [in Canada] needs to know this part of our shared history—all Indigenous peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) and all settlers"⁵. The education of the "truth" about residential schools to the Canadian public is

⁴The law enforced that children were taken between the ages of 7-15 years (Kelly, 2008, p. 23).

⁵ The term "settler" encompasses all of whom are not Indigenous and who therefore settled on Native land: early French and English settlers and their descendants; subsequent groups of settlers; as well as recent

intended to enlighten them about Indigenous realities in Canada, a country that once explicitly envisioned Indigenous demise or complete assimilation for numerous decades. This knowledge then, of a disturbing reality and the injustices and trauma of lived Indigenous experiences under such a system, is hypothesized, from the statement we saw earlier, to transform Canadians to feel empathetic toward Indigenous peoples. This transformation, as described in Schedule "N," is the route to reconciliation; it is to be the basis for establishing healthy relationships. It is to be the basis for forging a brighter future together where Indigenous peoples are respected for their "citizens plus" status, and their previous treaty promises and rights as the First Peoples of Canada and are upheld.

Difficult knowledge is "necessary to break us out of a numbing routine [...] to provoke self-doubt" (Britzman & Diplo, 2000, p. 34); it is from "the persistence of awful thoughts [that] a state of open-mindedness where exploring issues of allegiance, commitment, destruction, trauma, and community can be taken seriously" (p. 36). Neither can it simply be *more* knowledge – "disruptive" knowledge is required for challenging oppression (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 34), like deconstructing "normalcy" as a socio-cultural construct. However, if Indigenous peoples are opening up and sharing painful stories to inactive ears, or not being heard at all, who is doing the transforming? On a deeper level, by striving for reconciliation, the TRC is presumably asking more of Canadians than simply being put to tears by painful stories. What a public education of assimilative colonial policies, of genocidal policies, of building healthy relationships and reconciliation between Indigenous peoples, non-Indigenous and the Canadian government truly means is claiming a genuine, supportive responsibility for the colonial past. And this is indeed a lofty goal.

From truth to reconciliation: pedagogical possibilities

Canadians taking responsibility for our colonial legacies involves the acknowledgement that non-Indigenous peoples are all complicit in allowing a destructive system to go on for so long. It is an acknowledgement of the types of beliefs that rationalized such a system and that it has taken until 2010 for the stories to be shared in a public space for a national audience. It is also an acknowledgement of the ignorance and erasure of the impacts the residential school system has had on an entire population and how these account for many negative behaviours present today. These acknowledgements are profound and would require a shifting, at least momentarily, of Canadian pride to that of guilt and shame for having such stains on our national conscience (Alfred, 2005), and feelings of empathy for those who have fallen victim to such a regime. Learners would be encouraged to achieve a critical consciousness about the privilege that they hold in a society where, due to their heritage, but not that of certain "others," they were exalted as representative Canadians. They held a perceived desired citizenship as national subjects, which allowed for them to dictate how these "others" should live, while avoiding the turmoil their dictates imposed (Thobani, 2007).

The confidence-shaking of such learning would recognize privilege not as a quality acquired by hard-working immigrants that "pulled themselves up by their bootstraps"; but instead, as a social position granted via prejudice and racial bias. Reflecting on Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, disruptive learning shifts the focus to a "pedagogy for the privileged" (Curry-Stevens, 2007), where learners are encouraged to recognize that those who hold power as a

newcomers to Canada.

dominant group, dictate privilege: who will have better access to privileged life situations, opportunities, as well as be able to disadvantage and differentiate themselves from those deemed "inferior" based on ethnocentric criteria. This includes policies such as placing children in residential schools to "civilize" them. As a set of steps in the process of confidence-shaking for privileged learners then, one must begin with an awareness of oppression as present, and then explore oppression as being structural and not confined to the past (Curry-Stevens, 2007, p. 45). This partly entails reconsidering the idealized Canada many believe in, in addition to recognizing the naturalization of dominance (Ibid., p. 46). This learning would then encourage a critique of the dynamics of oppression in our society and a structural analysis of power (Ibid., p. 47).

Another important aspect to this learning requires us to situate ourselves, according to Curry-Stevens, as oppressed. This is relevant because we can all share in the common experiences of having suffered injustices in our lives. That this be affirmed is inherent to all human beings and provides the foundation from which we build empathy for one another (Ibid., p. 48). From here stems the more difficult task of locating oneself as privileged, recognizing the "benefits that flow from that privilege," and then seeing oneself as oppressor (Ibid., p. 49). Learners are asked to recognize that "their life experiences have been affected by their privileged identity," "their social location" in society (Ibid., p. 48-9). "Most important of all, no one is off the hook since we can all claim to stand as oppressor and oppressed in relation to someone else," (Razack, 1998, p. 47). This last step where we understand how we act to oppress others will encounter much resistance, but it is a necessary final culmination to this education.

Ultimately, this would be an education not only for the privileged, but for all Canadians - newcomers and established settlers- in the hopes of deconstructing oppression and breaking down oppressive structures. What follows from these steps is then a process of confidence-building, wherein the learner is encouraged by the educator to unlearn domination and thus improve social justice by challenging inequality (Curry-Stevens, 2007, p. 54). This challenging could come in the form of transformed relationships, to the coalition-building between immigrant and Indigenous peoples that Thobani espouses (2007, p. 17). Moreover, Sinclair points out that newcomers are not exempt from the process of continued colonial relations because what they are gaining now is something that was taken away from Indigenous peoples, mainly land and resources (2009). This is not an easy task to ask of persons who may be fleeing from oppressive regimes themselves, but a working example of how our identities as oppressor and oppressed can be simultaneous, or how class solidarity could be more constructive to attending to injustices than solidarity along racial or gender lines (Collins, 1989, p. 1).

This pedagogical framework demonstrates how education can indeed be transformative: how empathy, as it were, can translate into social action. The TRC may catalyze empathy in some, where people would then be motivated to press for more funding for on-reserve schools, for instance, or would recognize the importance of keeping the only First Nations university in Canada in existence and well-funded. However, much of this pedagogy depends on an effective and supportive educator, or basically a social justice coach. The next section complicates the notion of empathy and national sentiments even further and elaborates on some of the shortcomings the TRC may face in light of their public education aspirations.

Complicating the empathetic body politic

In *The Politics of Bad Feeling* (2005), Sara Ahmed problematizes notions of "national shame" and "feeling bad" with regards to the injustices toward Indigenous peoples in Australia. Structured around "Sorry Days" and "Sorry Books" (an opportunity for members of the Australian public to apologize for their country's own assimilationist policies), the author argues that these feelings fall short of creating solidarity or reconciliation; that the latter necessitates instead solidifying sentiments into action, creating different relationships between people and the "effects of histories of violence" (Ahmed, 2005, p. 84). She claims that through these shaming events, the body politic moves too quickly through guilt, shame and mourning in the hopes of "putting the past behind us," or in other words: now that non-Indigenous Canadians have felt bad, they are entitled and empowered to feel good again. These bad feelings allow for the reader to enter into a relationship with the "other," but one wherein "the pain of others becomes 'ours', an appropriation that transforms and perhaps even neutralizes their pain into our sadness" (Ibid., p. 74). Monture-Angus (1999) reiterates this point: "When non-Aboriginal guilt becomes the focus of any process meant to address historical wrongs, Aboriginal pain is appropriated and then transformed. This transformation is a recreation of colonial relationships" (p. 26).

These feelings of shame emanate from the acknowledgement of a history of unjust social relations. If these feelings go unquestioned or uncriticized however, in the movement from shame to pride, we will then witness a re-covering of the nation through a forgetting of those very relations of violence (Ahmed, 2005). This premature movement from shame to pride does not represent reconciliation because it is not inclusive of all who are still injured from historical wrongs and from our failure to recognize them today. The forging of new relationships is not confined to interpersonal relations, but extends to the connections we have to our own feelings and injuries. Recognition of injury through truth-telling and our witnessing of such stories is necessary for reconciliation, wherein "feeling better" would be achieved through the exposure of healing as a form of recovery, and not simply "feeling better" through the recovery of pride.

In *The Risks of Empathy*, Boler (1997) argues that "passive empathy" - concerns directed to a distant other - is insufficient at educating the reader to engender social change; this type of reading enables simplistic and consumptive modes of identification with the "other." Passive empathy situates the privileged in a position of "voyeuristic pleasure of listening and judging the other from a position of power/safe distance" (Boler, 1997, p. 260). Through her own experiences as a professor of multiculturalism, Boler argues that educators should be pushing for a "testimonial reading," invoking the responsibility of privileged listeners. Educating *nationals* and thus shifting the colonial imaginary requires questioning if we can truly know the "other's" experiences, because empathy implies full identification with their suffering. Instead, the author suggests that "testimonial reading inspires an empathetic response that motivates action: a 'historicized ethics' engaged across genres, that radically shifts our self-reflective understanding of power relations" (Boler, 1997, p. 256). Empathy implies a fear for oneself, where the "other" and their pain become secondary to the concern that these injuries could potentially happen to you. Empathy operates inasmuch that it identifies our differences wherein I can safely say I am not presently the one suffering. This "empathetic identification requires the 'other's' difference in order to consume it as sameness" (Ibid., p. 258), as shared history. A testimonial reading then would require students to place themselves alongside the "social forces that create the climate of obstacles the other must confront," (Ibid., p. 257) in an effort to persuade students to act upon these forces.

"Testimony," as is necessary in statement gathering of residential school experiences, "is trauma's genre" (Boler, 1997, p. 264): these "uncomfortable stories" (St. Denis, 2009, p. 178) of excess and unimaginable horrors promote self-reflective engagement of the reader's position of power and safe distance, and also abdicate the reader's responsibility for these oppressive social forces, attitudes, practices and structures. Listening differently is crucial to this process of critical learning and of establishing relationality with truth-tellers, where we are continually unsettled by asking ourselves what it means to be taught by the experiences of others (Simon et al. eds., 2000, p. 6), in particular by historically suppressed voices. "Education remains important to any struggle to reduce inequality" (Mickelson & Smith, 2004, p. 269), but education on its own does not necessarily lead to social change. In this regard, Razack (1998) suggests "ground-clearing activities" as a conduit to such a goal:

what [this refers to] is reflecting critically on how we hear and how we speak; on the choices we make about which voice to use and when to use it; and, most important of all, on developing pedagogical practices that enable us to pose these questions and use the various answers to guide those concrete moral choices we are constantly being called upon to make (Razack, 1998, p. 54).

We can see after exploring these examples that the TRC cannot expect transformation simply through storytelling. These painful experiences, where the opening of wounds may not be heard because of the consumptive benefit the dominant population may derive from them (Ibid., p. 48), will demand an ethical listening and reading, and will necessitate follow-up discourses and activities in order to produce social change.

Beyond risks: important obstacles to reconciliation

Let us return to the reasons why the government implemented the policy of promoting awareness and public education of the IRS system, and the education that is truly needed to be able to embark on a path of reconciliation. In other words, if education was to be truly transformative, what would that transformation look like? This question elicits the broader theme of what it is we would like to see change about the way Canadian society operates, the latter's relations with Indigenous peoples, and why transformation is needed.

In *Race and Reconciliation in a Post-TRC South Africa*, Valji (2004) argues that the transition from apartheid to democracy and the subsequent ideologies espoused by the TRC have been far more complex than idealized. She describes how racial prejudice and violence did not suddenly disappear post-TRC, but continues to be an obstacle to substantive equality and inclusive citizenship. Valji evaluates the contribution of the TRC to current understandings of history and identity, and how the TRC's ironic silence on the issue of "race" constitutes a barrier to real reconciliation. She problematizes the TRC's role in producing transformation and outlines the importance of taking ownership of our colonial history to advance reconciliation (Younging et al., 2009). Real reconciliation would entail acknowledging the inherent racism necessary to devise institutions like the residential schools. The pervasiveness of this racism can also partly explain why it took until 2008 for the government to issue a public apology. Indeed, "one way to dehumanize an individual or a group is to deny the reality of their experiences," notes Collins (1989, p. 11). Therefore, we will know that reconciliation has occurred when every Canadian truly

knows not only about the residential school system, but more importantly how such a system becomes naturalized and its impacts become decontextualized.

The impacts of colonial policies - and Canadians' indifference to them - produce and reproduce various social issues such as discrimination, inadequate housing, domestic violence, poverty, and destructive lifestyles. Reconciliation will only be possible, then, if racism is recognized as structural, pervasive and on-going; but is also addressed as impactful, and inherently linked to other forms of discrimination, like sexism. Canadians have denied that racism and gendered violence fuelled colonization, whose benefits are not restricted to the past and early colonial Canadians, but continue to benefit all non-Indigenous. We thrive off of what was taken away from Indigenous peoples (Sinclair, 2009). This lack of understanding supports the inappropriate notion that racism is based on individual acts and not generated through systemic, structural means (Dion, 2009, p. 150). Addressing racism through critical pedagogical practices would be representative of the government of Canada and Canadians' "profound commitment to establishing new relationships embedded in mutual recognition and respect" (Sch."N"), whereas a conventional education may "initiate a response to the suffering but refrain from engaging in a discussion of the cause of that suffering" (Dion, 2009, p. 126). One Onkwehonwe⁶ perspective on learning offered by Alfred (2995) advocates that learning is itself one of transformation, an act of radical defiance that defines a warrior. A critical education is needed then to support questioning of the interconnectedness of knowledge and power; where there is a language of critique to address the systems in place that racially discriminate, but as well, a language of possibility that maps out hopeful relationships and the path toward them (Dion, 2009).

As Beverly Jacobs noted in her address in the House of Commons in June 2006 and in her response to Prime Minister Stephen Harper's apology two years later, the unjust realities that many Indigenous peoples face are human rights violations or, as Ward Churchill (2004) put it, crimes against humanity. It is under these conditions that TRCs are created. Jacobs states in her response that undergoing transformation will be observed when change has occurred: when languages have been revitalized, women are no longer targets of violence, and Indigenous peoples are no longer disproportionately living in poverty (2008, p. 225). "I look forward to the day when we are no longer fighting for equality because we have reclaimed our way of being," (2008, p. 225) says Jacobs.

Change and transformation therefore are related to a shifting of power wherein the dominant culture no longer tolerates taken-for-granted stereotypes and "we know what's best for you" attitudes. "The process of reconciliation must first recognize and then ameliorate the power imbalances between Canada as a nation and First Nations" (Monture-Angus, 1999, p. 33). We will witness this transformation and reconciliation when it spells a national acceptance of Indigenous title and rights, and status as "citizens plus"⁷; when there is a reaffirming of nation-to-nation relations; when adequate financial resources are allocated to alleviating social ills; when Canada fully acknowledges these human rights violations and significantly tries "to remedy in full the consequences of colonial imposition" (Ibid., p. 23).

Indeed, one might question the sincerity of the government's "profound commitment"

⁶Original people (Alfred, 2005, p. 19).

⁷Construction coined by Harry B. Hawthorn in what has now come to be known as the "Hawthorn report": Hawthorn, H. B., ed. (1966-7). *A Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada: Economic, Political, Educational Needs and Policies*. Ottawa.

(Sch."N") when confronted with the news of funding cuts to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) for the 2010 fiscal year. The AHF was directly funded by the government to address the legacies left behind by the residential schools, and the AHF in turn funds community-planned, community-driven projects on the ground. We are left wondering if this sort of action really adds validity to the statement that the TRC is part of a process of "sincere indication and acknowledgement of the injustices and harms experienced by Aboriginal people and the need for continued healing" (Sch."N"). These funding cuts come in light of the fact that these testimonies, these truths, will require the opening of wounds, which has already been initiated with the Common Experience Payments and Independent Assessment processes.

If this TRC process is only superficially taken up by Canadians and we do not see a sincere implementation of Canada's apology, then as Monture-Angus (1999) writes,

[t]his kind of apologizing accomplishes more in the direction of massaging white guilt than in alleviating Indian pain. In fact, in the aftermath of the so-called [1998] apology, I was witness to an unleashing of memories and pain in Indian communities--communities where existing social services and health resources were largely inadequate to deal with the memories that were turned to the surface by the Minister's apology (p. 26-7).

This sentiment of unease was reiterated as well at the "Truth, Reconciliation and the Residential Schools" conference at Nipissing University in March 2010. Indigenous peoples in Canada and the marginalized are burdened by the telling and retelling of personal, traumatic stories because of the inability for many Canadians to listen, or to act once these stories have been heard. Furthermore, "if the truth is told and goes without response, this might result in further harm to the relationships involved" (Llewellyn, 2008, p. 200). The opening up of these wounds would not be in vain then if once heard, we saw a sincere working toward reconciliation and toward an inclusive citizenship.

Other obstacles to this goal of reconciliation initiated by the TRC are outlined in its very mandate. The TRC is not allowed to cover the experiences of those who were in day schools; they have financial limitations; there will be no naming-of-names, which would make certain people, groups or organizations accountable for their actions; and the Commission will only operate for five years, after which, how this education will continue has not been decided. The methods for public education have not been established beyond the national events, which seems problematic in terms of who will witness these events and if they can genuinely generate a sustained commitment to change. Advocating responsibility and recognizing our complicity as oppressors is usually characterized by rather intimate processes of confidence-shaking, as the work of the educators quoted above in workshops and classrooms attest to. Transformative education is already complex and without a clearly defined trajectory, it becomes that much harder to imagine.

Some scholars have critiqued the Commission overall because it may in fact be distracting from potentially more important issues such as land claim settlements. The residential school legacy is part of a longer colonial history that began with the dispossession of Indigenous lands. This last point speaks to a discourse that sees the theme of "recovery" as restraining, and suggests one of "regeneration" instead. According to Alfred (2005), a "regeneration of ourselves and our nations" (p. 151) would promote a transcendence of these colonial experiences. What would follow is "restitution," instead of reconciliation, the latter Alfred describes as "fatally flawed because it depends on the false notion of a moral equivalency between Onkwehonwe and Settlers and on a basic acceptance of colonial institutions and relationships" (Ibid.). According to this

reasoning, reconciliation is a “Western-based concept to be imposed on the Aboriginal peoples without regard to their own traditional practices of restoring personal and collective peace and harmony,” not to mention that several authors argue that conciliation had never even taken place (Ibid., p. 22; AHF TRC, 2008). Indigenous peoples do not need to reconcile with colonialism, but instead Canadians need to establish, according to Alfred, “how to use restitution as the first step towards creating justice and a moral society” (Alfred, 2009, p. 182).

A last consideration is the centrality of collective Indigenous “rights”⁸ and land claims in many of these struggles that can largely be understood as antithetical to the neoliberal functioning of the Canadian state. The issue of land claims - which goes hand in hand with establishing sustainable economies - can be construed by *nationals* as barriers to individual settler claims, territorial expansionism and related capitalistic endeavours. These are enormous obstacles to feasibly establishing the equal relationships needed for reconciliation, and it remains to be seen “whether a genuine multiracial democracy can be created and sustained in an era of global economy and a moment of xenophobic frenzy” (West, 2004, p. 126).

Some recommendations to the TRC

The TRC will end its mandate with the creation of a research centre and a report complete with recommendations. Considering that the aforementioned structural limitations are evident and Sinclair, Chair of the Commission, himself has doubts about the potential impact the TRC (CBC, 2010), these recommendations then could potentially be catalysts for restoring relationships through transformative education. The recommendations would do well to propose educational policy that would mandate an accurate history of Indigenous-settler relations in schools. On the other hand, some are sceptical of the possible extent of critical pedagogy in state-run institutions.⁹ Therefore, imaginative pedagogical avenues run jointly or perhaps separate from the state’s ideological apparatuses all-together may be necessary.

The TRC might also recommend language revitalization programs, renewed funding for the AHF and equitable funding to on-reserve First Nations students. They could recommend funding for site-specific services in urban centres that would address stressful life situations that are attributable to these legacies and intergenerational trauma (Menzies, 2008; Spittal, 2002). The TRC could also recommend a more pervasive allowance for the possibilities of self-determination over education and health services, for instance. Ultimately though, so that these recommendations are acted upon by government, they need to be endorsed by a wider Canadian public, which “requires that they attach a lot of significance on a daily basis to everything that can foster constructive management of the relationship” (Dussault, 2009, p. 33). This would necessitate garnering public interest and support through community and national-level awareness and media campaigns. These circumstances made the recommendations put forth by the *Berger* inquiry impossible to ignore and indicate mechanisms for success (Stanton, 2010). Parliament needs to “make room for Aboriginal representation in mainstream political life” (Amagoalik, 2008, p. 95) in general. What would be complimentary or at least equally helpful is

⁸ Rights have been criticized as an essentially Western concept, as well as rights are state-defined and divvied out as such.

⁹ Althusser (1971) describes schools as *state apparatuses* and Antonio Gramsci (1971) states that schools maintain hegemony and the dominant social order, as also cited by Kumashiro (2000, p. 36).

pressing for an international body that would overlook TRC processes globally and press for change post-TRC. “The conversation about reconciliation is not optional, and it could be central to the agenda of the United Nations if we acknowledged global realities” (McKay, 2008, p. 104). This is an avenue the TRC has already implicated itself in by presenting a proposal to the UN.

Education and awareness are fundamental to developing public interest and support, and highlight the significance of pedagogy in the whole process of truth and reconciliation. Transformation through education, or reconciliation through truth-telling and responsible listening, will only be achieved if these obstacles are addressed and overcome. The TRC may possibly provide the spark from which we will see the beginning of an engagement by the Canadian public toward this shared colonial history, its impacts and ongoing relations. The methods necessary for attending to these items and the place of transformative education within the TRC process still remain to be determined as the Commission's work unfolds.

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