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## Teacher/Indigenous Partnerships: Building Engagement and Trust For History and Social Science Education

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Illinois Council of Social Studies

**Teacher/Indigenous Partnerships:  
*Building Engagement and Trust For  
History and Social Science education*<sup>1</sup>**

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What gets taught in publicly funded schools is a political choice. In Canada, these politics can clearly be seen with the release of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), a government funded commission which examined the effects of Canada's abusive residential education system for Indigenous people from the 1870s through the 1990s. The TRC's Calls to Action, especially calls 62 and 63, advocates for the inclusion of Indigenous curriculum and content in publicly funded education systems. These calls have compelled provincial Ministries of Education, schoolboards, schools and teachers to have conversations about including Indigenous content and worldviews into their curriculum. Often missing from these conversations, especially in schools and school boards where the majority of the teachers are non-Indigenous, are the voices of Indigenous people themselves. By excluding Indigenous perspectives about content from curricular and pedagogical conversations, what is taught lacks a critical and decolonial lens and continues to support state agendas that privilege settler narratives over those of Indigenous nations.<sup>2</sup>

This paper focuses on strategies non-Indigenous teachers can use to teach Indigenous content in ways that builds on the contributions Indigenous people have made to these conversations. In particular, formal teacher training is important, but so is self-education and reflection, and non-traditional approaches to content development and delivery, such as community partnerships. The important focus is not just on content that covers Indigenous peoples and history, but to cover this content in ways that align with Indigenous worldviews. My work as a non-Indigenous historian who has worked with Indigenous communities, teachers, and students to develop relevant Indigenous content and perspectives from the Ontario Social Science and Canada and World Studies curricula continues to demonstrate that unless there is

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<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank Samantha Cutrara for her endless editing support, Meghan Cameron for helping me remember the work we did and always being a sounding board on educational ideas, and the Board of Directors of the GWCA, especially the education sub-committee (Meghan, Peter Farrugia, and Paula Whitlow) for taking the time to work with these education and programming ideas during our many meetings.

<sup>2</sup> For more on how state agendas are privileged in teaching, see Curry and Horn in this volume.

engagement with local Indigenous populations on whose lands schools are located, meaningful and transformative learning about Indigenous people cannot happen within Canadian school systems.

### **Placing Myself Within the Learning**

As a white/non-Indigenous historian teaching in higher education, and as a former consulting researcher for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), I have always been concerned about how Indigenous content is taught to non-Indigenous students. Before my graduate studies, and before my time with the TRC, I worked with local museums and as a research assistant to community members and academics from the Haudenosaunee (Six Nations) community at Grand River, near Brantford, Ontario. Within these contexts, I was part of many conversations about how the information we collected could be used to teach others about the lived experiences of Indigenous people. After I completed my work for the TRC in 2012, and reading their calls to create Indigenous content for the publicly funded school system, I explored methodologies for including Indigenous content in classroom lessons to ensure they contained Indigenous worldviews and perspectives. My ideas and concerns, however, were isolated to my university teaching where I taught mostly in the First Nations Studies Program at the University of Western Ontario and could ask an Indigenous colleague for help or give a guest lecture to my classes to ensure that these perspectives were included to my courses. It was not until 2014 and my work with Meghan Cameron and the Great War Centenary Association of Brantford, Brant County, and Six Nations, that I began to fully recognize the limitations of how Indigenous topics were taught in Ontario high schools.<sup>3</sup>

### **Attempts Reframing Indigenous Education In Canada**

Concerns over adding Indigenous content that lacked the integration of Indigenous worldviews and perspectives into high school curricula has been found in many Indigenous and governmental reports. For example, the 1972 position paper, *Indian Control of Indian Education*, the National Indian Brotherhood (the precursor to the Assembly of First Nations),<sup>4</sup> outlined that attempts to create a safe and respectful environment for Indigenous students in provincial school systems had failed largely because Indigenous peoples and communities were not present or consulted in the process. As a result, Indigenous histories, values, languages, traditions and culture were not included in provincial curricula (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972). In order for provincial schools to be more effective transmitters of Indigenous culture, the Brotherhood

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<sup>3</sup> See [www.doingourbit.ca](http://www.doingourbit.ca) and Cameron and Habkirk (2021) in this volume.

<sup>4</sup> The Assembly of First Nations advises Canada's federal government on Indigenous issues.

recommended that the federal government work with provincial and territorial governments,<sup>5</sup> school boards, teachers, parents, school staff, consultants, and specialists from Indigenous communities to provide training for teachers, staff and counselors since these individuals determine “the success or failure of many young Indians.” The report found that people in these positions were “simply not prepared to understand or cope with cultural differences” putting “[b]oth the child and the teacher...into intolerable positions” (National Indian Brotherhood 1972).

Although this paper was approved by the Department of Indian Affairs in February 1972 and was subsequently supported by numerous Indigenous and governmental reports, the process outlined by the Brotherhood gained little traction (Long 2000; RCMP 1996; White and Peters 2013).<sup>6</sup> The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), a commission established in 1991 to examine Indigenous issues in Canada after the violent Oka Crisis in 1990, found that minimal Indigenous content was taught in provincial and territorial schools. Content also varied from province to province and school board to school board. Further, this fragmented content did little to incorporate Indigenous understandings and worldviews into provincial curricula and school lessons (RCAP, Vol 3, 1996, p. 465). The TRC, over twenty years later, also found patchworks of provincial and territorial education plans and curricula whose effectiveness could not be measured (Godlewska *et al.*, 2010; Habkirk, 2019; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009; White and Peters, 2013, p. 26).

To combat piecemeal efforts to transform curricula, policies, and programing, both RCAP and the TRC echoed the Brotherhood’s 1972 report, advocating for improved funding for curriculum design and the development of cross-cultural curricula that supported Indigenous cultures “voices, experiences, and perspectives that build a common ground between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples” (RCAP, Vol 3, 1996, p. 474 and 501 and TRC, Vol. 6, 2015, p. 122). Both Commissions also recommended that Indigenous parents and Elders be welcomed in schools as guest speakers, tutors, volunteers, coaches, and counsellors to advise on cultural programming, develop curriculum and other teaching resources, and provide traditional activities and ceremonies for the school community (RCAP, Vol 3, 1996, p. 461-467, and 526). Further, the Commissions emphasized that any resources these parents and community members

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<sup>5</sup> Funding for Indigenous education comes from the federal government as they are constitutionally responsible for Indigenous people and, therefore, their education. Provinces and territorial governments became involved with Indigenous education through the federal government signing agreements and providing funding to them for the education of Indigenous children. At the time of their report in the 1970s, these agreements were made without consultation with Indigenous communities (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 5).

<sup>6</sup> According RCAP, from 1960 to 1992, over 22 reports were federally produced about Indigenous education, all of which resulted in little action (RCAP, Vol 3, 1996, p. 440 and 441).

produced needed to be accepted by school boards as authoritative given they were created by members of the Indigenous communities these school served (RCAP, Vol 3, 1996, p. 461).

Both Commissions also recognized that teachers would need assistance if these changes were to be impactful. After interviewing teachers, Commissioners noted that both existing and incoming teachers and staff needed fully funded cross-cultural training “to develop...high-quality education, based on understanding of Aboriginal culture and values and on issues in Aboriginal Canadian relations” that focused on treaties, historical information and dispelled stereotypes about Indigenous people (RCAP, Vol 3, 1996, p. 499 and 574).

### **Teachers and Post-TRC Education Reforms**

Pedagogically, school boards and teachers have struggled to understand how best to incorporate Indigenous ideas and worldviews into the curricular changes recommended by the TRC’s Calls to Action. Curriculum changes take considerable time to achieve and require cooperation among advocacy groups, teachers, and school boards. They also need to be supported by both provincial and federal governments (McGregor, 2017, p. 2). As provincial Ministries of Education across Canada began rolling out new curricula documents for their school boards, some consulted with Indigenous communities, some borrowed approaches and pedagogies from other provinces and territories, while others implemented new strategies, like those of the Historical Thinking Project (Cutrara, 2017a).<sup>7</sup> Throughout this process, several scholars noted major deficiencies in how teachers were to implement these new approaches without proper training or updated textbooks (Godlewska *et al.*, 2017, p. 448-458; Paradkar, 2019d). They also recognized that some provinces continue to experience challenges when including Indigenous perspectives in their curricula (Cutrara, 2018b; French 2020; Gibson and Peck, 2018; Habkirk, 2019; Johnson and Claypool, 2010, p. 123; *Two Row Times*, July 2018). Changes in education policies, fraught with intergovernmental and other political wrangling, have left teachers in a precarious position: they are required to teach new Indigenous content but lack the resources, support and training to do so.<sup>8</sup>

This lack of training is the biggest hurdle for including Indigenous content and worldviews in education systems in Canada (Cutrara, 2018a). Although educators purport to welcome the additions proposed by the TRC, many are also concerned about the many subjects they are supposed cover in their classes, especially without adequate resources providing guidance on how to do this respectfully and in accordance to how Indigenous people want these ideas taught (Calerley, 2019; Carstairs, 2020; Cutrara, 2017b; Hogan and McCracken, 2019).

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<sup>7</sup> For more on the findings of the Historical Thinking Project, see Seixas & Morton, 2013. As noted by Lindsey in this volume, the six concepts of historical thinking, recommend by the Historical Thinking Project can also subjugate, omit, or distort the histories of certain groups, like Indigenous people, if used incorrectly.

<sup>8</sup> For more on how more teacher training about controversial topics is needed, see Curry and Horn in this volume.

Unless they are confident about a subject, teachers may shy away from teaching new materials. This lack of preparedness could also lead to potentially damaging content and messaging being delivered to Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike, leaving teachers with feelings of fear and anxiety before they even enter the classroom (McGregor, 2017, p. 11-13; Morcom and Freeman, 2019, p. 24).<sup>9</sup>

### **Undoing and Refocusing Teacher Training**

As noted in the example above, teacher training is one of the largest obstacles for non-Indigenous teachers to teach Indigenous content in meaningful ways that reflects what Indigenous people want non-Indigenous people to know about them. Although some programs have been tried by teachers' colleges to familiarize non-Indigenous teachers with the Indigenous communities they will be working in or to recruit Indigenous teachers already familiar with Indigenous subjects and communities, this has done little to change the teaching practices of non-Indigenous teachers who are trained in western academic paradigms and discourses (Long, 2004, p. 275-276; Morcom & Freeman, 2019, p. 22).

Since teaching Indigenous content within provincial school systems continues to be highly politicized at the federal and provincial levels, funding for training in Indigenous content and its delivery is not guaranteed and, in many cases, has been cut from provincial education planning (French, 2020; Habkirk, 2019; *Two Row Times*, July 2018). This leaves this training up to either individual school boards and schools, who can hire Indigenous communities members as consultants or "cultural mentors" to help non-Indigenous teachers teach Indigenous content and lessons in their classrooms<sup>10</sup> or ask teachers to complete this training at board mandated professional development days, or by teachers who actively have to seek out these training opportunities to become confident in teaching Indigenous subjects and content. This uneven training has led to large gaps in teacher education, with one Indigenous educator providing this training in the Toronto area noting that "usually, it was the same 60 to 70 folks who were becoming awesome allies" by coming to her workshops, but also noted that unless students found themselves in these teacher's classrooms, they would not receive this culturally appropriate Indigenous content (Paradkar, 2019f, A12). Other teachers have actively resisted this training (Martin, 2016; Paradkar, 2019f, 12). For example, after being asked to participate in an exercise to understand privilege, one teacher refused, saying "I'm not walking that circle,

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<sup>9</sup> This is especially true for non-Indigenous teachers who are posted to schools with a majority Indigenous population. This discomfort can translate to non-Indigenous teachers not willing to stay at these schools. This is reflected in the results of 28 surveys researcher John Long sent to non-Indigenous teachers who taught at First Nations schools in northeastern Ontario, which found that less than 40% of those surveyed would be staying at these schools (Long, 2004, p. 266, 270, and 276). Also see the results of Curry and Horn in this volume.

<sup>10</sup> For more on this process in the Grand Erie District School Board, in Ontario, Canada, see Cameron and Habkirk in this volume.

because what's the point?...I can tell where this is going. It's like the walk of shame. It's like a perp walk. And what are we doing with this knowledge of privilege? How do I apply it in class" (Paradkar, 2019c, A13)? This teacher would later change their opinion of this training, later noting that "In the past I would have just rolled my eyes in my head. Now I feel that have to speak up" (Paradkar, 2019c, A13).

As observed in the above example, without this training, colonial culture and systemic racism will continue within provincial school systems. For Indigenous students, the non-Indigenous classroom remains a site of cross-cultural conflict where the dominant culture is privileged over their own (Jacob, 1998, p. 143; Paradkar, 2019b). When content and pedagogies are challenged by Indigenous students or parents, instead of adapting to new cultural ideas, non-Indigenous school administrators and teachers tend to default to the dominate culture and educational system as being "correct." This continues to marginalize Indigenous peoples, their culture, as well as other racialized peoples, exhausting and discouraging Indigenous teachers, parents, community members and/or students from engaging with non-Indigenous people in educational spaces (Belcourt, 2019; Fraser, 2016; Paradkar, 2019a, A4; St. Dennis, 2018, p. 147 and 150).

In the absence of training, teachers can familiarize themselves with Indigenous perspectives by using recourses produced by Indigenous peoples and allied scholars in their classroom and teaching. Academic organizations, like the Canadian Political Science Association and the Canadian Historical Association, have created reading lists responding to the TRC's Calls to Action that can educate both teachers and students on Indigenous issues (Canadian Historical Association, 2019; Perry, 2020). There are also many relevant children's books written by Indigenous authors that address residential and boarding school experiences while other Indigenous scholars have created and compiled resources to aid Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers in teaching residential school content in their classrooms (Bellrichard, 2015; Cutrara, 2016; McCoy, 2018, p. 274; Mlynek, 2017; Toulouse, 2018).<sup>11</sup> Films can also be used to create or amplify classroom discussions about Indigenous issues (Carlton, 2014; Darnell, 2001; McCoy, 2018, p. 265-267; Reimer, 2010).

Digital content can also be used by teachers to introduce their students to Indigenous histories and worldviews, including the website, "Four Directions Teachings" (Invert Media, 2016). Virtual archives, like the Carlisle Indian Industrial School Resources Centre and the

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<sup>11</sup> Educators may also want to consult the website of the not-for-profit Indigenous Story Studio for short graphic novels and comic books on many Indigenous topics including gang prevention, residential schools, and sexual health, to name a few (<https://istorystudio.com/>). Another source to consult for Indigenous produced books, classroom materials, and teacher's resources is GoodMinds.com, an Indigenous owned and operated online bookstore which advertises over 3,000 titles. See their catalog at <https://goodminds.com/node/46764> or their resources for teachers at <https://goodminds.com/httpwwwtworowtimescom>.

Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre, can also be used as classroom resources (Doran, 2014, p. 150; The Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre, n.d.). Currently, the Woodland Cultural Centre offers virtual tours of the former Mohawk Institute Residential School (Woodland Cultural Centre, n.d.). Indigenous cultural centers have also created educational materials that can aid in the teaching of Indigenous subjects, or can direct teachers to this content (Woodland Cultural Centre, 1987 and 2013).<sup>12</sup> These many resources allow teachers to “incorporate content and learning resources that represent diverse perspectives, paradigms, or disciplinary approaches...create learning activities that allow students to explore difference and practice...and provide opportunities for students to reflect on and gain a better understanding of their own multiple cultural, personal, and disciplinary identities” (Dimitrov and Haque, 2016, p. 17-20 and Curry and Horn, this volume).

With the inclusion these recourses in their classrooms and their own personal education, teachers can begin the process of disrupting the settler discourses. This can work for any level of schools and was tested in my upper level undergraduate course, “*Public Education as Truth and/or Reconciliation?*,” which I created for the Political Science Department at the University of Toronto.<sup>13</sup> In this course, students and I worked through the politics of reconciliation, assessed whether the current Ontario education system was equipped to answer the TRC’s Calls to Action 62 and 63 and meaningfully engage with and teach Indigenous and residential school content with the newly revised Social Studies and Canadian and World Studies curricula. For their final projects, students selected a subject and grade level from these curriculum documents and, using the documents, existing educational and class materials, and outside research, determined whether they could create and teach Indigenous content and worldviews to promote reconciliation. They found this assignment to be a worthwhile and practical challenge as many wanted to transition from university to teachers’ college, with the final objective of becoming teachers.

Being non-Indigenous most, if not all, of the students agreed that it was impossible to deliver Indigenous worldviews without the aid of Indigenous people. They did, however, create many meaningful lessons that questioned Canada’s colonial narratives or introduced their potential/future students to question their positioning on Indigenous land. This, however, took considerable time to search out and incorporation of many outside resources. For example, one group planned exceptional lesson that challenged Canadian colonial narrative by using a map of residential schools created by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (2007) which noted when each school was established. Using this map, and following key dates in Canada’s western expansion,

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<sup>12</sup> These are only two educational resources created by the Woodland Cultural Centre since their founding in 1972. For more resources, see their library website at <https://woodlandculturalcentre.ca/library/> or their museum store at <https://woodlandculturalcentre.ca/store/products/>.

<sup>13</sup> This course ran at the St. George campus of the University of Toronto during the winter term of 2019.

the students were able to show that these schools were established at the same time Canadian authorities expanded their laws and settlement westward, with these schools acting as a way of containing and assimilating Indigenous peoples.

These and similar lessons that focus on settler land literacy can be a means to introduce and address uncomfortable conversations in the classroom, but these can also perpetuate settler narratives if developed exclusively by non-Indigenous people (Hampton and Demarti, 2007).<sup>14</sup> This discourse, however, can produce good results, allowing teachers to ask difficult questions about the land, its occupation and treaty rights as part of the classroom experience (Cannon, 2018, p. 160-161; Johnson and Claypool, 2010, p. 133).

As Cannon observes, these questions can include ideas like,

- *Who Canadian citizens know themselves to be, and how much of who they think they are depends on keeping racialized others, status Indians in particular, firmly in place?*
- *How do we explain the need for certainty about Indigenous difference, and how much of this is tied to the dispossession of lands?*
- *What are modern-day practices of difference-making, where are they located, and how do they operate in the contemporary world?*
- *How do non-Indigenous peoples interact with our difference and alterity; [and]*
- *What sorts of material and symbolic work have gone into the dispossession of land and spaces, including the urban spaces we occupy and have always occupied (Cannon, 2018, p. 158)?*

Questions like these encourage non-Indigenous students to examine and engage with their place in colonial histories of Canada and examine the privileges they have gained, directly or indirectly, from these narratives (Cannon, 2018, p. 158-160). Further, these questions do not ask the student if they are racist, but instead encourage them to consider how they benefit from past policies that have gained them or their families a place of privilege, moving past feelings of guilt in order “to foster a collective responsibility for our complicity in social inequality, and work toward changing this” (Cannon, 2018, p. 160; Paradkar, 2019b). These lessons “can allow students—both Indigenous and non-Indigenous—to understand the historical formations of present relationships, including the associated formations of colonization, Eurocentrism, and resulting inequities,” help non-Indigenous students identify classist and racist historical interpretations and counter misinformation about Indigenous people, while also introducing students to important

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<sup>14</sup> For more on how settler colonial narratives are created, internalized, and damage the decolonial discourse, see Veracini, 2010 and Tuck and Yang, 2012.

conversation about Indigenous land and treaty rights (McGregor, 2017, p. 11; Paradkar, 2019g, A14).<sup>15</sup> Although these lessons may feel uncomfortable for teachers (see Paradkar, 2019b), by bringing these issues to the forefront, teachers can create and provide a space where Indigenous students can feel comfortable in the classroom while creating potential allies among non-Indigenous students. In this way, teachers can play a critical role in disrupting colonial binaries and help their students acknowledge their individual and collective responsibilities to Indigenous people in Canada.

### **Reforming Education Through Teacher Self-Education and Reflection**

While creating their lessons, non-Indigenous teachers need to take time to establish metrics that evaluate whether their attempts to include Indigenous voices in their lesson plans are effective and challenge Canadian national discourses through self-education and reflection.<sup>16</sup> Reaching out to the local Indigenous community to understand how they frame their understandings of their history and culture is key in this process. The best way to break the cycle of colonial learning is by incorporating Indigenous ideas of education and ways of thinking into lesson planning, but these ideas need to come from Indigenous communities. Questions teachers should ask when creating or (re)evaluating their lessons regarding Indigenous content include:

*does content break down the rationalization of the colonial relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people; do you have a clear, well-communicated rationale for the Indigenous content included in your courses; have you amassed a well supported amount of Indigenous expertise to teach this content and if not, what is your plan to create and sustain one; and does this content include room for the diverse histories and lived experiences of the many Indigenous people residing in Canada (McCallum, 2016)?*

Other ideas to keep in mind when developing culturally appropriate Indigenous themed content include are lessons rooted in holistic understandings of “place and land; family and kinship...the politics of recognition and reconciliation in a context of entrenched historic and ongoing colonialism; and...the practices of decolonization” (McCallum, 2016), can this lesson be experiential and/or enacted on the land (Cross *et al.*, 2020; Johnson and Claypool, 2010, p. 125; *Two Row Times*, October 2018), does the lesson center around Indigenous language and

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<sup>15</sup> One such misconception noted by McGregor is the idea that Indigenous communities demand “hand-outs” of money from the federal government. This misinformation can easily be challenged through treaty and land literacy education, showing students that this part of the treaty process and the lack of funding available to Indigenous communities is due to failures of the federal government honoring the original spirit and intent of treaties and/or failing to come to equitable/agreeable solutions with Indigenous people (2017, p. 11).

<sup>16</sup> Curry and Horn, in this volume, also recommend the need for teachers to be reflective of the information they relay in their classroom lessons.

worldviews (Hjartarson, 1995; Johnson and Claypool, 2010, p. 125; McLeod, 2010, p. 45), and does your lesson allow students to explore the seven Rs: roots, relationships, revelations, resiliency, resistance, reclamation, and reflection (Cross *et al.*, 2020)?<sup>17</sup> Lastly, when teaching Indigenous topics, teachers need to give up the hierarchical structure of their classrooms and allow learning and teaching to be reciprocal between students, teachers and invited Indigenous community members (McLeod, 2010, p. 55; Paradkar, 2019e, IN5).

By working with the local Indigenous community, teachers are held accountable to Indigenous people and the knowledge they bring into the classroom, creating a caring and reciprocal relationship between educators and Indigenous communities. Once a relationship, based on trust and dialogue, is established, it can then be transferred into the classroom to create an environment in which teachers and students are able to question their worldviews and grow to value Indigenous knowledge (McLeod, 2010, p. 48-53; Paradkar, 2019d, A21; Paradkar, 2019e, IN5). This approach allows the teacher to “develop an awareness of their own cultural and disciplinary identities and positionality in the classroom” while also anticipating, valuing, and accepting differences among learners to create cultural safety and trust (Dimitrov and Haque, 2016, p. 7-8; Paradkar, 2019c, A13). By questioning and acknowledging their power, teachers can limit their ingrained biases toward western knowledge/education, can better act as a model for respectful perspective-taking in the classroom, while also encouraging their students to take “non-judgmental approaches to exploring cultural, social, or other types of difference” (Dimitrov and Haque, 2016, p. 8-9). Further, this will aid teachers to help their students “deal with the uncertainty involved in exploring difference” and “create opportunities for peer learning and interaction among diverse learners” (Dimitrov and Haque, 2016, p. 10-11 and 14).

This self-education and reflection also needs to be present after the lesson is taught and should also be done with the members of the local Indigenous community whose lands your school resides. This can be done through observation-based evaluations by Elders and Indigenous knowledge holders during or after the lesson (Johnson and Claypool, 2010, p. 129-131). These reflections must also include the students through listening or interviewing them in debriefing sessions to understand what they learned (Jacob, 1998, p. 144; Paradkar, 2019g). Active student engagement with new class materials, ideas, ways of learning, and post-lesson evaluation has the potential to energize students as they not only become learners, but teachers whose understandings and points of view are valued and inform the educational process.

This reflection process also has the potential to affect the culture of the school. Following the recommendations of the National Indian Brotherhood (1972), RCAP (1996), and the TRC (2015), if teachers bring other teachers or school administrators into this reflection and

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<sup>17</sup> Cross *et al.* cite that the seven Rs methodology is found in the book Doerfler, Stark & Sinclair (eds.), (2013) *Centering Anishinaabeg studies: Understanding the world through stories*. University of Manitoba Press.

post-lesson evaluation process with Indigenous peoples, especially if these teachers and/or administrators are interested in doing similar work in their classrooms or schools, it can result in long term reforms to school culture and aid in the decolonization of provincial classrooms no matter the whims of federal or provincial governments. By being proactive, partnering with Indigenous communities, and participating in self-education and reflecting with other teachers and school administrators, educators become learners in how to integrate Indigenous ideas into new educational processes and developed the skills to reflect systematically on their colonial educational practices (Jacob, 1998, p. 147-148).

### **Disrupting the Narrative Through Community Partnerships**

These types of partnerships challenge colonial discourses in education and allows the Indigenous community to guide the changes they want to see in local schools. This changes the script from schooling being something “done to” to “done by” Indigenous people (Long, 2000, p. 219). As noted by RCAP and the TRC, these educational partnerships can be effective tools in incorporating Indigenous thought and worldviews into public school curriculum. In their final report, RCAP noted that integrated programs, like the Akwesasne Science and Math program between the Akwesasne Mohawk community and local non-Indigenous school board found ways in which students could be taught science and math lessons found within the provincial curriculum alongside traditional Indigenous values and knowledge (RCAP, 1996, Vol. 4, p. 166). RCAP also noted other working partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to bring Indigenous ideas and worldviews into provincial curricula, including the Dene Kede and Inuuqatigitt Curricula in the Northwest Territories, the SIMA7 and Camp program between Indigenous and divisional school boards in Northwest Territories and Kativik School board in Nunavut, the provincially funded Children of the Earth High School in Winnipeg Manitoba, and the Ile-a-la-Crosse School Board in northern Saskatchewan, which offered the Michif language as a credited course and integrates Metis values, history and culture as an integral parts of their Kindergarten to grade 12 curriculum (RCAP, 1996, Vol. 3, p 460 and 461 and Vol. 4, p. 166 and 167).

Similarly, the TRC also noted successful partnerships between teachers and Indigenous communities. For example, Ottawa school teacher Sylvia Smith created Project of Heart in 2008 by inviting students, teachers, Elders, and residential school survivors to come together to learn about Aboriginal history, languages, values, traditions, teachings and residential schools. This initiative has been so successful, it expanded to other schools and now has become a national program (TRC, 2015, Vol. 6, p. 123).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Sylvia Smith was awarded the Governor General's History Award for Excellence in Teaching for her work on Project of Heart in 2011.

In the wake of the TRC's final report, many nation-wide reconciliation projects have also been started in schools across Canada through the Gord Downie and Chanie Wenjack Fund.<sup>19</sup> Every November, the province of Ontario recognizes Treaties Recognition Week, which is slowly beginning to impact the provincial school system, providing another avenue for schools and teachers to critically engage with Indigenous communities and the treaty histories in their local communities (*Two Row Times*, November 2018).<sup>20</sup> To combat Indigenous student dropout rates, Indigenous and provincial school boards have also created Indigenous language programs with the help of Indigenous Elders and community members (Burnaby *et al.*, 1998, p. 66-68; Feurer, 1993, p. 133 and 135; Long, 2005, p. 244-245 and 250; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 23 and 26).

Others are responding to the TRC's recommendation to teach about residential schools through supporting "Orange Shirt Day," which is an initiative where children wear orange shirts to school to raise awareness about residential schools. Many schools and school boards have used this day as an opportunity to bring residential school survivors and other Indigenous community members into their schools to share their stories, with some schools, like those in the Grand Erie District School Board, going to the Woodland Cultural Centre, the former Mohawk Institute Residential School, to hear survivors and participate in Indigenous led workshops (*Two Row Times*, September 2019).

In Alberta, 14 schools in the Edmonton Catholic School District participate in the Braided Journey Program. This program offers Indigenous students a safe space with tables, chairs, computers, fridge, microwave, books and one full-time staff member who is "dedicated to working one-on-one with students who self-identity as Indigenous to facilitate the transition from junior high to secondary and then post-secondary education" (Paradkar, 2019d, A21). For Indigenous students, this space and coaching gives them support, food, traditional medicines which calm anxiety and provides a place of respite from the western education system (Paradkar, 2019d, A21). One of the participating schools even opened the space and programming to staff and teachers so they could better understand the program and what it provides Indigenous students, providing them with an understanding of Indigenous education and cultural teachings (Paradkar, 2019d, A21). Since adding this programming, all participating schools have noted a significant raise in Indigenous student graduation while giving non-Indigenous students and

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<sup>19</sup> See <https://downiewenjack.ca/our-work/legacy-schools-programs/>.

<sup>20</sup> This initiative is new and not completely accepted throughout Ontario, causing an Indigenous newspaper, the *Two Row Times* (2018 November), to editorialize, "this work is beginning. It is not perfect. Sometimes it is not even good. Sometimes it is a downright mockery. Sometimes settler descendants have adult tantrums while they do it – but I like to think of these times as part of the growing pains that are necessary toward a true nation-to-nation relationship."

teachers a chance to interact with the traditional cultures of the Indigenous communities that surround them (Paradkar, 2019d, A21).<sup>21</sup>

### **Community Partnerships in Action: The GWCA Case Study**

Settler/Indigenous partnership were the cornerstone of the Great War Centenary Association (GWCA) educational programming that we developed for classroom use. This partnership shows how, by working with Indigenous communities, teachers and educators can challenge colonial approaches and messaging in education. Wanting to create an educational website in addition to public outreach events and educational programming to highlight the wartime histories of the City of Brantford, the County of Brant, and the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory, the GWCA Board of Directors wanted to establish community partnerships with relevant stakeholders within the Six Nations community to accurately tell their side of the conflict.

In 2012, I and Paula Whitlow, fellow board member and then-director of the Woodland Cultural Centre, formed the GWCA's Six Nations sub-committee. Our task was to liaise with various Haudenosaunee/Six Nations heritage organizations and share, with their permission, their histories of the First World War on a fully funded website. Working with the Six Nations Legacy Consortium, a group of Six Nations knowledge holders and heritage organizations supported by both the traditional Haudenosaunee Confederacy Council and the elected band council, Paula and I took sections of my MA thesis on Six Nations during the First World War and other writings by GWCA board members and re-wrote the information to ensure they reflected what these knowledge holders knew and wanted to share with the outside community.<sup>22</sup> These community-informed revisions formed the core of the Six Nations themed educational articles found on the GWCA's website and the basis for our community educational programming (GWCA 2014a, b, c and d).

In order to turn these online articles into lesson plans, Paula and I joined the GWCA education sub-committee, chaired by then teacher at the Brantford Collegiate Institute (BCI), Meghan Cameron.<sup>23</sup> Using these resources, Meghan, Paula, and I created three lesson plans that were compliant with the Ontario Social Studies and Canadian and World Studies curricula, which could be adapted to teach a full day or one class unit. Again, working with Six Nations educators, the Woodland Cultural Centre, and the Six Nations Legacy Consortium, these lesson

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<sup>21</sup> In 2017, although the overall Indigenous graduation rate in Alberta was 57.8%, the Braided Journeys Program's Indigenous graduation rate was 75.5%, with one school reporting a jump from 14.9% of Indigenous students completing three years in school in 2009 to 43.8% in 2011 (Paradkar, 2019d, A21).

<sup>22</sup> For more on this process, see Habkirk, 2018.

<sup>23</sup> Cameron is now the head of the Department of Humanities at Cayuga Secondary School in Haldimand County.

plans were vetted to ensure they taught their community narratives and understandings and presented what they wanted students to know about their wartime experience.

Creating these lesson plans was a learning experience. Since my experience was based in university classrooms, Meghan had to teach me how public school curriculum documents worked and how high school teachers created their lesson plans. Paula and I also worked with Meghan to ensure Indigenous narratives and points of view were included in the lessons, even if they countered what Meghan and other teachers had previously understood about Indigenous people in Canadian history. This was not always a smooth process, but by being in continual dialogue with each other and our community partners, misunderstandings and knowledge gaps were narrowed. After a year of community consultation, the GWCA held its own knowledge sharing conference, introducing our educational programming and Ontario curriculum compliment lessons plans to local educators and heritage organizations.

Although this work was lauded by non-Indigenous educators who used our information and lesson plans within their classroom with great success,<sup>24</sup> results were inconsistent, even with our best efforts to ensure that Six Nations community narratives and understandings of the war remain at the center of this content. Some teachers, when working independently from either Meghan, who did the majority of teacher training for the GWCA, or other GWCA board members, defaulted to the ingrained biases found in existing educational resources;<sup>25</sup> rather than representing Haudenosaunee as separate nations and allies to the British Crown before, during and after the war, they represent the Six Nations as assimilated people who fought on behalf of Canada along with their fellow Canadians.<sup>26</sup> When conflicts like this happened, Meghan, after teaching our lessons within her classroom, or helping other teachers bring this material into their classroom, continued to meet with Paula, myself, and other members GWCA board, allowing us to use the community partnerships established by the Six Nations subcommittee to improve the delivery of information and lesson. Meghan also talked with both her Indigenous and non-Indigenous students after a lesson was delivered to understand how they interacted with the information that was presented. This feedback was also communicated with the board of the GWCA, the Six Nations subcommittee, and our community partners. These feedback loops allowed for the GWCA to constantly reflect with our Indigenous community partners and ensure that Six Nations narratives and understandings of the war, no matter who was teaching with our lesson plans, stayed at the center of the lesson. It also ensured that students were engaged with

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<sup>24</sup> This was tracked through surveys the GWCA had teachers fill out after our programs ran in their classrooms.

<sup>25</sup> This trend of teachers defaulting to state narratives they had been previously taught was also observed by Curry and Horn in this volume.

<sup>26</sup> For what is taught about Indigenous people in World War One in Ontario schools, see Fielding & Evans, 2000, p. 57 and Hundey & Magarrey (2000), p.71.

the content of these lessons and learned to challenge colonial narratives about the war, even if they countered the settler narratives found within their governmentally mandated textbooks.

## **Conclusion**

This article illustrates some practices non-Indigenous teachers can employ in their classrooms to promote decolonization and respectfully position Indigenous ideas and worldviews over/against those of Canadian colonial narratives. Through partnerships with Indigenous communities, teachers can begin the long process of integrating Indigenous ideas into local school curricula and lesson plans as recommended by many Indigenous and government-sponsored reports. I must caution, however, that this is a band-aid solution to a larger systemic problem that has been, and continues to be, ignored by countless federal and provincial governments. This puts the entire burden of finding solutions to these issues on underfunded Indigenous communities, busy Indigenous Elders and knowledge keepers, and proactive teachers. Although my work with Indigenous people, non-Indigenous educators, and university students to create Indigenous-centric lesson plans from existing elementary and high school curricula shows positive results, until provincial governments fully support the recommendations of the TRC and other reports to ensure that Indigenous knowledge holders are adequately recruited and funded to do this vital work of reforming provincial curricula, this approach will not create a full decolonization of an education system or even a classroom. Until these resources are available and changes are implemented, it will be up to individual school boards, schools, and most importantly teachers, to find ways to include and teach Indigenous content and ensure its accuracy, advocacy, and relevance in their classroom lessons.

The need to teach this information is urgent, and the cost of not doing so is high. A current scan of social media or newspapers headlines show that long-held held stereotypes about Indigenous people by educators and students are hard to overcome and can lead to further entrenchment of long held racist and colonial biases (Gamble, 2020; Vowel, 2016, p. 176-177, Yang, 2018). The approaches discussed in this paper can introduce students to new content, ideas, and understandings of the Indigenous cultures that surround them and teach them valuable lessons about social justice and settler colonialism. Although not a full decolonization of our education systems, these partnerships with Indigenous communities, and the addition of Indigenous content, has the power to change non-Indigenous ideas about Indigenous people and shows that Indigenous values, knowledge and worldviews can be equally respected and valued in provincial classrooms. These lessons of respect for Indigenous peoples, knowledges, and worldviews will go a long way in informing students about their place in Canada's colonial legacy that will stay with them long after they leave the classroom.

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