
Research article

Teaching and learning the legacy of residential schools for remembering and reconciliation in Canada

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Abstract

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada released a Final Report containing 94 Calls to Action. Included were calls for reform in how history is taught in Canadian schools, so that students may learn to address such difficult topics in Canadian history as Indian Residential Schools, racism and cultural genocide. Operating somewhat in parallel to these reforms, social studies curricula across Canada have undergone substantial revisions. As a result, historical thinking is now firmly embedded within the curricula of most provinces and territories. Coupled with these developments are various academic debates regarding public pedagogy, difficult knowledge and student beliefs about Canada's colonial past. Such debates require that researchers develop a better understanding of how knowledge related to Truth and Reconciliation is currently presented within Canadian classrooms, and how this may (or may not) relate to historical thinking. In this paper, I explore this debate as it relates to Indian Residential Schools. I then analyse a selection of classroom resources currently available in Canada for teaching about Truth and Reconciliation. In so doing, I consider how these relate to Peter Seixas's

six concepts of historical thinking (Seixas and Morton, 2013), as well as broader discussions within Canada about Indigenous world views, historical empathy and Reconciliation.

Keywords Truth and Reconciliation; historical thinking; history education; historiographic poetics; Indigenous world views; ethical relationality; historical empathy

Introduction

When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada released its 94 Calls to Action in 2015, educators across Canada were challenged to find ways to reconcile terrible wrongs that had been systematically perpetrated against Indigenous Peoples in this country. Since that time, a considerable number of new teaching resources have been developed with the intent of addressing the Calls to Action. Some of these resources focus primarily upon the legacy of Indian Residential Schools, while others place more emphasis upon Reconciliation or Treaty Education; in turn, debates have arisen as to whether historical thinking, as a pedagogy for historical inquiry, can provide students with the necessary cognitive tools to achieve meaningful Reconciliation. In this paper, I explore this pedagogical crisis in history education, as it relates to Indian Residential Schools, educational reform and historical thinking in Canada. I then review current examples in teaching and learning about Indian Residential Schools and Reconciliation in Canada. Through my analysis, I highlight how these examples relate to historical thinking, as well as to broader discussions in Canada around Indigenous¹ world views, historical empathy and Reconciliation.

Context

In 2015, educators across Canada were called to action by a landmark report by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that specifically listed 94 ways to bring about meaningful change. Action points relating to Indigenous education included the elimination of educational and employment gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians; levelling of funding inequalities for First Nation children educated on and off reserves; development of culturally appropriate curricula; protection of Indigenous languages through education; and honouring of treaty relationships (TRC, 2015a: 2).

Action points relating to non-Indigenous education included the development and implementation of mandatory – Kindergarten to Grade 12 (5–18 years) – curricula, along with appropriate learning resources about Indian Residential Schools, Treaty Education and Indigenous Peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canadian society (TRC, 2015a: 7). The TRC (2015a: 7) also called for the integration of Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into Canadian classrooms, with the intent of 'Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect'.

All of this came about after an extensive six-year inquiry that involved collecting witness testimonials in all parts of Canada from more than six thousand Indigenous survivors, who had been taken from their families as children and placed for much of their childhood in Indian Residential Schools. Between the years 1870 and 1996, the government of Canada, in partnership with leading church organisations, operated over one hundred and thirty such schools (Figure 1). These institutions were designed to 'civilise' and assimilate over one hundred and fifty thousand First Nation, Inuit and Métis children through isolation and re-education. The schools were intentionally located great distances from Indigenous communities, so that when children arrived, they could be stripped of their culture and language, isolated from their family, and forced to comply with a strict code of conduct. In these schools, Indigenous children were often victims of mental, verbal and physical abuse; a great many were also preyed upon as objects of sexual abuse (TRC, 2015b; see also Legacy of Hope Foundation, 2020). For thousands of families, their children never returned home – a fact that was made ever more profound to Canadians in 2021, when the unmarked graves of 215 children were found on the grounds of the Kamloops Indian Residential School (Barrera, 2021).

Figure 1. Residential Schools of Canada (Source: National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation Archives)



Canada's legacy of Indian Residential Schools

The extent of this terrible past became publicly apparent in 2005, when the then National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Phil Fontaine, spoke out about his own experiences of abuse. At the same time, he also announced a class-action lawsuit against the government of Canada over the harmful legacy of Indian Residential Schools. This lawsuit led to a 2006 out-of-court settlement, known as the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (the largest class-action settlement in Canadian history), which resulted in a five-billion-dollar compensation fund that allocated \$10,000 to every residential school survivor for the first year of school attendance, and \$3,000 for each additional year (Gray Smith, 2017: 85). This settlement plan came into effect in 2007.

Financial compensation, however, was not nearly enough; the agreement also provided for the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), intended to 'create as complete an historical record as possible' of Indian 'Residential School experiences, impacts and consequences', by providing a 'holistic, culturally appropriate and safe setting for former students, their families and communities' to come forward to share their legacies. The commission was mandated with preparing a final report that would provide insight on 'the effect and consequences' of Indian Residential Schools '(including systemic harms, intergenerational consequences and the impact on human dignity) and the ongoing legacy' (Government of Canada, 2008: 1–2).

One year later, Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued an official apology to the Indigenous Peoples of Canada in the House of Commons, an action that came somewhat on the heels of Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's apology for the 'Stolen Generations' of Indigenous Peoples in that country (Henderson and Wakeham, 2013: 333). In Canada, however, while Prime Minister Harper's apology was well received by First Nation, Métis and Inuit representatives who attended the ceremony, others felt that his words fell short of what was required – and were thus non-apologetic and insincere (Mackey, 2013; Eshet, 2015: 163–5). This perception came about because the prime minister's statement was carefully worded to not include any references to broken treaty agreements, Indigenous rights, or any intentions

to bring about policy change. In short, the colonial framework that had made Indian Residential Schools possible and socially acceptable in Canada would continue unchanged.

Yet, when the TRC's final report was released in 2015, its main conclusion was clear:

For over a century, the central goals of Canada's Indigenous policy were to eliminate Indigenous governments; ignore Indigenous rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Indigenous Peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada. The establishment and operation of residential schools were a central element of this policy, which can best be described as 'cultural genocide'. (TRC, 2015b: 1)

So it was in this context that the TRC issued 94 Calls to Action, which have since become a driving force behind significant societal reform (including education) across vast jurisdictions within Canada.

Historical thinking

Operating somewhat in parallel with developments around the legacy of Indian Residential Schools, social studies curricula across Canada have undergone substantial revisions with regard to history education. As a result, historical thinking (a history domain-based approach to learning about the past) is now firmly embedded within the curricula of most provinces and territories (Seixas and Colyer, 2014). More recently, the University of Alberta, along with more than forty partner organisations across Canada, has launched a seven-year pan-Canadian research initiative, designed to survey how history is taught and learned in Canada. So it would seem that the two parallels have thus reached a point of intersection, since two of the key mandates of the pan-Canadian initiative are to explore Indigenous frameworks for navigating Canada's past, and to develop classroom resources that support historical thinking (Thinking Historically for Canada's Future, n.d.). Herein lies the central problem that frames this paper: is it possible for two distinct ontologies (world views) to coexist within history education? If so, how might reforms in historical thinking support this coexistence?

In Canada, historical thinking is guided by a framework that evolved out of Seixas's (1993, 2017) theoretical research around how historians 'tackle the difficult problems of understanding the past' (Seixas and Morton, 2013: 7). This call for educational reform was rooted in Canada's 'History Wars' of the 1990s, which took place at a time when nationalists such as Jack Granatstein (1998) and the Dominion Institute rallied for the revival of history in schools – for the purpose of promoting national unity (Seixas, 2010: 19). Rather than engaging in battles regarding which national narrative should be taught over another, however, Seixas proposed that Canada set its 'History Wars' aside, and instead adopt a common framework for historical inquiry, by which students could learn to investigate the past for themselves. The resulting framework (which is now readily accepted for use in Canadian schools) constitutes six concepts of historical thinking, designed to enable students to think like historians, and thus begin to construct their own narratives about the past (Seixas and Morton, 2013: 3). These six concepts are:

- **Historical significance** – identifying specific events, people or developments as significant enough to 'occupy a meaningful place in a narrative' (Seixas and Morton, 2013: 10)
- **Evidence and sources** – drawing evidence from primary sources by asking 'good' (p. 7) questions, evaluating sources, establishing context and corroborating evidence
- **Continuity and change** – making sense of changes over time by establishing chronologies, identifying 'turning points' (p. 7), evaluating progress over decline, and organising information around periods in history
- **Cause and consequence** – mapping out a complex web of consequences (both intended and unintended) by identifying historical actors and trying to understand any social, political, economic or cultural factors that may have influenced their actions
- **Historical perspectives** – avoiding presentism by trying to understand historical events (and the actions of historical actors) in the context of their time, based upon evidence
- **Ethical dimension** – drawing 'lessons' from the past by making ethical judgements, while being 'cautious about imposing contemporary standards of right or wrong on the past' (p. 11), and thus responding in meaningful ways.

In light of the horrific experiences of Indigenous Peoples throughout Canadian history, historical perspectives and the ethical dimension – as defined by Seixas and Morton (2013) – are particularly

relevant to this discourse, because they raise questions regarding student capacity for historical empathy and understanding, as outlined in the Calls to Action.

Historiographic poetics and Reconciliation

Reflecting on Seixas's (1993) intent for historical thinking, one of the most difficult problems that educators must now face is moving forward in Reconciliation. This is where the writings of Roger Simon (2005, 2011, 2013) become most relevant, as educators consider the intersection of two ontologies: (1) a disciplinary approach to history; and (2) Indigenous ways of knowing. In this context, history education is not just about teaching the subject of Indian Residential Schools, but rather about changing the hearts and minds of a nation. So, while now more than ever, historical thinking has an important role to play in tackling 'the difficult problems of understanding the past' (Seixas and Morton, 2013: 7), perhaps historical thinking alone is not enough. This is where Roger Simon's (2005) theoretical writings around remembrance-learning and historiographic poetics become fundamentally important to the current discourse.

'What might it mean to live our lives as if the lives of others truly mattered?' (Simon, 2005: 88). This is the question that Roger Simon posed in his 2005 treatise on the pedagogical significance of remembrance-learning. His response was that if the lives of others truly mattered, then we should accept the memories of others as *counsel* and learn from them. In this context, Simon (2005) was referring to witness testimonies of the Sayisi Dene peoples, who were forced to move northward by the Canadian government from their traditional homelands of northwestern Manitoba, to the barren shores of Hudson Bay. Through individual witness testimonies, Simon argued, one can learn to listen to others, question one's own firmly held settler beliefs about the past, and begin to empathise with those who bear witness. Simon (2005: 160) described this as 'historiographic poetics' – the juxtapositioning of different (first-hand) points of view, or remembrances – as a way of disrupting students' beliefs, thus drawing out personal meaning through victim voice, bringing the past into the present, and enabling societal re-generation through empathy and Reconciliation (p. 102–3).

Writing several years later, at a time when the TRC inquiry was still in its initial phases of testimony gathering, Simon (2013) expressed concern over how public pedagogy might respond to the enormity of the survivor narratives that were being collected. Given the gravity of such witness testimonies,² which revealed horrific, protracted and widespread underpinnings of systemic cultural genocide, how might non-Indigenous Canadians resolve their own beliefs about Canada's noble past? In revisiting Prime Minister Harper's apology of 2008, Reconciliation in this context requires more than just words – it requires action intended to bring about change in the present.

Drawing from international discourses on the 'ethics of responsibility' (Simon, 2013: 130; Baum, 1996; Britzman, 1998; Chakrabarty, 2008; Kennedy and Wilson, 2003; Muldoon, 2005; Regan, 2007; Schaffer and Smith, 2004; Vizenor, 1999), Simon (2013, 136–7) thus called for a transformative approach to all aspects of public education, in which non-Indigenous Canadians could reflect and participate in the responsibilities of Reconciliation. Through 'historiographic poetics', Simon (2013: 136) reasoned, non-Indigenous students could find opportunities to interweave their own life stories with those of Indian Residential School survivors, thus disrupting their own firmly held settler beliefs about Canada's past. In this context, Simon (2013) called for a total transformation of history education, so that Indigenous Peoples could position themselves as central historical actors in history (on their own terms), and Indigenous world views could be respected as providing equally valid knowledge about the past (see also Simon, 2004: 197; Bell, 2008; Potvin, 2021; Regan, 2010; Taylor, 2018, 2019). This logic aligns itself very well with the theoretical works of Marie Battiste (2002, 2010, 2013; see also Battiste and Youngblood Henderson, 2000) and others (Bartlett et al., 2012; Hatcher and Bartlett, 2010; Nicholas, 2008) who have presented non-Indigenous Canadians with the pedagogical framework of *Etuaptmumk* ('two-eyed seeing').

Etuaptmumk: Two-eyed seeing and Reconciliation

The concept of *Etuaptmumk* ('two-eyed seeing') is attributed to Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall (2018), who first brought forth the principle in 2004, as a method for co-learning in science:

Two-Eyed Seeing is the gift of multiple perspective treasured by many aboriginal [Indigenous] peoples ... it refers to learning to see from one eye with the *strengths* of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the *strengths* of Western knowledges and ways of knowing, and to using both these eyes together, for the benefit of all ... Two-Eyed Seeing further enables recognition of IK [Indigenous knowledge] as a distinct and whole knowledge system side by side with the same for mainstream (Western) science. (Bartlett et al., 2012: 335)

Mi'kmaq leader Battiste (2010), as well as Hatcher and Bartlett (2010: 17), have since proposed 'two-eyed seeing' as a practical method for integrating Indigenous world views into all aspects of education – particularly with regard to social studies and history education:

Canada's education systems have largely ignored Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy ... It is now clear that the exclusive use of Eurocentric knowledge has failed the First Nations children (Battiste, 2002). In much of that curriculum, Aboriginal [Indigenous] people are often viewed as subjects to study rather than active creators of knowledge. Students need to see Aboriginal [Indigenous] knowledge reflected in the curriculum. The Eurocentric (or Western) approach is largely based on hierarchical, linear thinking. In the Indigenous worldview, knowledge and the learners are intimately connected, in contrast to their separation in Western thinking.

Moreover, like Simon, Battiste (2013) and others (Hatcher and Bartlett, 2010; Potvin, 2021; Smith, 1999) have proposed that Indigenous world views be made equally available to all students, 'not just for Aboriginal [Indigenous] peoples, who would be enriched by that effort, but for all peoples' (Battiste, 2010: 17). This in itself is an important step towards understanding the difficult legacy of Indian Residential Schools, since, as Battiste (2010: 17) further explains, two-eyed seeing gives agency to Indigenous ways of knowing, and disrupts firmly held settler beliefs about Canada's past:

The initial educational struggle for Indigenous educators ... has been to sensitize the Eurocentric consciousness in general, and educators in particular, to the colonial and neo-colonial practices that continue to marginalize and racialize Indigenous students. This does not come easily to Eurocentric-educated White people, for it requires their unlearning as well – challenging their meritocracy and superiority myths to learn how their privileges were constructed and maintained in a racist society.

In a similar vein, Marker (2011, 2019) has also called for the inclusion of Indigenous world views in the study of history, by adopting specific reforms in the conventions of what he describes as Eurocentric historiographies. In this context, 'two-eyed seeing' is not simply a matter of acknowledging and recognising the 'otherness' of Indigenous ways of knowing, but rather responding in a meaningful way to the TRC Calls to Action:

If the curricula and teacher training that is developed does not examine the ways that Indigenous people[s] understood – and understand – the universe through advanced knowledge systems and deep ecological consciousness, the history of residential schooling may reveal only the darkness of racism and cultural genocide and fail to show the light of Indigenous wisdom that was devastated by the catastrophes of colonization. (Marker, 2019: 196)

Disruptive teaching strategies and Reconciliation

What becomes apparent from these scholarly writings is the notion of disrupting and (re)learning Canadian history, by making space for a diverse range of Indigenous voices. This approach to Reconciliation requires what Llewellyn and Parker (2018: 409) refer to as 'ethical relationality' (see also Donald, 2003, 2009, 2016).³ Drawing from the research of Christina Parker (2016), who worked with three Canadian classrooms comprised largely of ethnocultural minority immigrant students (aged 9, 10 and 12), Llewellyn and Parker demonstrate how role-playing and simulation techniques can be adopted to engage students in complex and conflicting perspective-taking dialogues. The authors thus conclude

that by adopting such a classroom approach, pre-existing 'taken-for-granted' (Llewellyn and Parker, 2018: 407) settler beliefs can be disrupted in a more inclusive (restorative justice) manner. Indeed, Tupper (2012, 2014) has also demonstrated how *Project of Heart* pedagogy and Treaty Education initiatives in Saskatchewan have created opportunities to reveal, challenge and, in some cases, disrupt settler beliefs among high-school students and pre-service teacher candidates.

In a similar vein, both Stephanie Anderson (2017) and Temma Frecker (Canada's History, 2018) also provide practical examples of disruptive strategies for history education. Anderson (2017: 14–15) proposes adopting a 'Counter National Narrative 3.0' approach, wherein students are encouraged to deconstruct 'competing, omitted, or silenced aspects' of the past through the lens of present-day historical issues. A classroom example of this pedagogy relates to the 2018 public controversy regarding the removal of the Sir Edward Cornwallis statue from a public park in Halifax, Nova Scotia (Williams and Patil, 2018). This present-day issue enabled Grade 6–8 teacher Temma Frecker and her students (aged 11–13) to undertake a classroom inquiry into why, if and how public history might be rewritten in a more inclusive manner. Commencing with the public controversy, Frecker's students deconstructed the various arguments for and against removing the statue, and then researched historical evidence behind Indigenous, settler English and settler French-Acadian perspectives – with the objective of reflecting upon their own perspectives on the past. Students' final assignment was to provide recommendations to public officials as to how the controversy might be resolved in a positive manner (Canada's History, 2018). In this way, Frecker engaged her students in exploring the ethical responsibilities of history in the present.

By contrast, however, Susan Dion (2004, 2009) has cited significant limitations in disruptive strategies that she has observed. Through her *Braiding Histories* project, Dion sought to understand how presenting students (aged 12–14) with alternative perspectives from Canada's past might provide more opportunities for adopting Indigenous world views (Dion, 2009: 13). What Dion (2009: 136) found was that her disruptive delivery model was restricted by teachers themselves, since they were more 'preoccupied with meeting their [disciplinary] responsibilities to teach facts and skills and to take care of students'. In this sense, a disruptive teaching strategy fell well short of what Simon (2004, 2005, 2011, 2013) describes as learning *from* the lived experiences of others; instead, Dion (2009) found that her disruptive learning tools became mere pathways for objectifying Indigenous Peoples – as the curious *other*.

In a somewhat similar vein, James Miles (2019) has also found significant limitations in disruptive strategies using photographic evidence. Through his research involving students (aged 15–17) examining Indian Residential School images, Miles (2019) observed that student empathy fell well short of Simon's (2005) objective of 'historiographic poetics'. Instead, students in Miles's (2019: 489) inquiry initially responded to the images in empathetic ways, but ultimately found ways to rationalise what they saw, and adopt positions of resistance or indifference: 'While students did accept that the children in the photographs were experiencing suffering as part of a process of forced assimilation enacted by the Canadian government, they did not explicitly connect this process with their own identities and investments as settler Canadians.'

Miles concludes that how the classroom teacher contextualises such images in their classroom activities is significantly important; in other words, simply analysing the evidence as a disciplinary exercise in historical thinking is not enough. More attention is required in learning *from* – rather than *about* – Indigenous peoples (Miles, 2019: 491).

Herein lies an important observation, since, as Ng-A-Fook et al. (2012: 66) have pointed out, 'Although the introduction of alter/native narratives which complicate grand [commonly held] narratives are essential, they are not necessarily an ultimate solution for disrupting the institutional governmental regimes that inscribe a curriculum of dominance.' Hence, educational reform for teaching and learning Indigenous history in Canada requires much more than a simple writing-in of Indigenous content, or disrupting well-established narrative beliefs. It requires what Raibmon (2018: n.p.) describes as an ontological shift away from settler beliefs that 'perpetuate false claims about the universality (and thus superiority) of European people and ideas'.

For example, as Raibmon (2018) points out, in order to establish historical significance, students must understand by whose standards, according to whom, and for whom significance is measured. Likewise, in rendering ethical judgements about the past that measure right and wrong by these same standards, are students merely reinforcing established norms and pre-existing settler stereotypes? Raibmon is certainly not the only Canadian scholar to raise such concerns (Cutrara, 2018, 2020; Furo,

2018; Grant and Rogers, 2019; Hatcher and Bartlett, 2010; Marker, 2019; Miles, 2018, 2019; Nagy, 2013; Ng-A-Fook and Milne, 2014; Regan, 2010; Rononhiakewen Longboat et al., 2019; Taylor, 2018, 2019).

Historical thinking and Reconciliation

Herein lies the challenge for history educators in Canada: how to bridge the distance between two world views while still respecting Seixas's (Seixas and Morton, 2013) six concepts of historical thinking, and how to move beyond a settler mindset that, until the 2015 TRC report, accepted the notion of Indian Residential Schools as normative within Canadian society. Certainly, the whole point of historical thinking is to move beyond the teaching of specific narratives; yet, within a disciplinary-based methodology for historical inquiry, can there be space for alternative ways of knowing? Samantha Cutrara (2018, 2020) suggests there cannot, while Gibson and Case (2019) argue to the contrary.

In critiquing Seixas's (2012) chapter contribution, entitled 'Indigenous historical consciousness: An oxymoron or a dialogue?', Cutrara (2018: 253–4) identifies significant limitations in Seixas's argument against making space for Indigenous world views in historical thinking. In particular, Cutrara (2018) describes the current framework for historical thinking as imposing 'settler grammar over the study of the past in such ways that widens the gulf between Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian knowledge systems, lessening the space available to develop the respect, openness for truth, and room for relationality needed to develop relationships of reconciliation'. Cutrara (2018: 260) also takes exception to Seixas's 'flippant' use of the term 'oxymoron', and challenges his logic by suggesting that historical thinking undermines the goals of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Reconciliation, explains Cutrara (2018: 268), requires an approach to history education that invites teachers and students to 'respect the different ways of seeing into the past and present, to believe these stories as truths, and to court relationships that allow these ideas to exist together'.

Gibson and Case (2019) have since published a counter-critique to Cutrara (2018). In so doing, the authors acknowledge that the TRC Calls to Action present history educators with significant challenges that are by no means unsurmountable. Historical thinking, as it has evolved within Canada – Gibson and Case (2019) argue – is well positioned to respond to such challenges; they are not alone in this assertion (Lévesque, 2016a, 2016b; McGregor, 2017; Miles, 2018) – although both McGregor and Miles have acknowledged that merging historical thinking with Indigenous ways of knowing presents epistemological constraints that may very well be unsurmountable.

Writing in direct response to Cutrara's (2018) critique, Gibson and Case (2019: 254) outline three specific areas for reform:

- Educators must strengthen the representation and centrality of Indigenous Peoples in Canadian history courses . . .
- Educators need to alter the way history has traditionally been taught as an established body of conclusions about the past that students are expected to accept . . .
- Curriculum developers in each province and territory should establish one or more integrated, multidisciplinary courses in Indigenous studies dedicated to teaching about Indigenous historical and contemporary worldviews.

Herein lies the current crisis in historical thinking in Canada. For the first time ever, Canadians – in general – and educators – in particular – must reconcile with a made-in-Canada holocaust, and a settler curriculum that perpetuated such acts of cultural genocide as systemically acceptable within Canadian society. For theorists Roger Simon (2004, 2005, 2011, 2013) and Marie Battiste (2002, 2010, 2013), Reconciliation requires Indigenous agency in bilateral curriculum and content development, validation of Indigenous world views, and disruption of settler beliefs, through the use of witness testimonies and respectful listening. For Katherine Llewellyn and Christina Parker (2018) and Jennifer Tupper (2012, 2014), Reconciliation requires disruption of settler beliefs through dialogic learning, empathic role-playing, and making space for a diverse range of Indigenous perspectives. Likewise, while Temma Frecker (Canada's History, 2018) has found success in adopting disruptive strategies that are grounded in the present, Susan Dion (2004, 2009) and James Miles (2018, 2019) have cautioned us on the hidden effect of objectifying Indigenous Peoples as the curious other. Undoubtedly, what becomes clear from the limited amount of empirical research published to date is that educational reform in Canada requires much more than simply adding Indigenous history to classroom resources; what is required is an ontological shift in

ways-of-knowing that makes space for Indigenous world views in the history classroom. For Samantha Cutrara (2018), such a shift cannot be accommodated within historical thinking; while for Lindsay Gibson and Roland Case (2019) a shift is not necessary, since historical thinking is what is needed in order to address the legacy of Indian Residential Schools in a disciplinary way (and Indigenous world views are to be left to the Indigenous studies – not history – classroom). Given the research findings discussed thus far, Gibson and Case's (2019) argument falls short of what is required for meaningful Reconciliation.

In the next section, I describe a selection of teaching resources that are currently available for history educators in Canada, and consider how each measures up to current discourses around teaching about Indian Residential Schools and Reconciliation in Canada. In keeping with the literature review presented thus far, the following criteria were established for evaluating each of the resources currently available:

- Indigeneity of the author(s)
- use of historical thinking concepts, and whether these are explicit
- opportunities for dialogic learning
- elements of two-eyed seeing (making space for Indigenous world views).

Teaching about Indian Residential Schools and Reconciliation

Gladys We Never Knew (BC Teachers Federation, 2017) – Focuses upon one Indigenous child, Gladys Chapman, who, as a 12 year old, contracted tuberculosis and died in 1931 while attending Kamloops Indian Residential School (British Columbia). Through a series of 10 lesson plans designed for primary level, students (aged 9–11) are introduced to the land and traditional Nlaka'pamux (Ing-khla-kap-muh) territory, where Gladys lived before being taken away to residential school at the age of 7. Through stories, document analysis and experiential activities (including *Project of Heart* and the *KAIROS Blanket Exercise*⁴), students enter into dialogues (with each other, as well as with members of the Spuzzum community) and learn to empathise with Gladys – as a person of their own age; they are encouraged to reflect upon how she might have felt; and conclude by writing letters of Reconciliation to Gladys, along with letters to their own parents about what they have learned. In this way students are encouraged to 'forge heartfelt personal connections to Gladys . . . [and] move together to a place of empathy and reconciliation' (BC Teachers Federation, 2017: 5).

The strength of this teaching resource lies in how it presents students with avenues to explore Indigenous ways of knowing that are specific and unique to Gladys's cultural identity. For example, students commence the unit by developing an understanding of who Gladys was as a person – in the context of her local environment, family and community. They analyse historical photographs of Gladys and her family, while adopting a 'see/think/wonder' protocol; and learn about her way of life by exploring traditional knowledge in Spuzzum (where Gladys lived). In this sense, students adopt a continuity and change technique (focusing on housing, food, work, recreation and travel) to consider what life may have been like, before and during Gladys's experience in residential school. Through such activities, students are presented with alternative (two-eyed seeing) perspectives on the past that support the TRC call for Reconciliation by 'Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect' (TRC, 2015a: 7).

While it is evident that student participants develop a great deal of historical empathy for Gladys, and components of evidence, historical perspective and ethical dimension are present in their student work, such elements are nevertheless not made explicit: that is to say, students do not knowingly employ concepts of historical thinking. Instead, they develop a great sense of connection to Gladys, which is more in line with Simon's (2005) definition of 'historiographic poetics' (drawing out personal meaning through victim voice, bringing the past into the present, and enabling societal re-generation through empathy and Reconciliation). Examples of this can be found in students' own words, compiled as a final reflection letter to parents:

Dear Mom and Dad,
 I've learned that Gladys was an Aboriginal that went to residential school and died by Tuberculosis. Tuberculosis is a type of disease. I'm sad that she died but happy residential school shut down. Why did the people who worked at residential school[s] have to hurt the children?
 I'm going to make sure I always show respect, honour and help with peace and forgiveness. I

will do my best to make sure none of this happens again. I[t] hurts that this happened, but I hope we learned [sic] from it.
Your son . . . (BC Teachers Federation, 2017: 156)

In these heartfelt words, there exists a compelling sense of affective emotion and responsibility in the present: what Simon (2004, 2005, 2013) and others (Battiste, 2013; Bartlett et al., 2012; Donald, 2003; Bell, 2008; Llewellyn and Parker, 2018; Marker, 2019; Miles, 2019; Nagy, 2013; Ng-A-Fook et al., 2012; Raibmon, 2018; Regan, 2010; Taylor, 2018, 2019) have identified as essential to Reconciliation: 'What might it mean to live our lives as if the lives of others truly mattered?' (Simon, 2005: 88).

Righting Canada's Wrongs (Gibson et al., 2016) – In stark contrast to *Gladys We Never Knew* (BC Teachers Federation, 2017), Gibson et al. (2016) present explicit ways of using historical thinking concepts to teach students (aged 9–11) about Indian Residential Schools. Designed by The Critical Thinking Consortium as a resource to be adopted in conjunction with the primary source book *Righting Canada's Wrongs: Residential Schools* (Florence, 2016), the objectives of this resource are to:

- provide 'a more complete picture of our past'
- engage in the use of primary sources
- enable 'rooting out institutional racism'
- teach Historical Thinking. (Gibson et al., 2016: 5)

Over seven lesson plans, the authors focus upon each of Seixas's *big six* concepts of historical thinking (Seixas and Morton, 2013), commencing with a chapter on how to read an image, and concluding with a section on teaching about racism. Each lesson plan is universally applicable to a variety of topics (five in total) that address the human rights subjects of: (1) Japanese Canadian internment camps (Hickman and Fukawa, 2012); (2) Italian Canadian internment camps during the Second World War (Hickman and Cavalluzzo, 2012); (3) the turning away of the Komagata Maru in Vancouver harbour, and Canada's anti-Indian immigration policies (Hickman, 2014); (4) Canada's Chinese Head Tax and anti-Chinese immigration policies of the twentieth century (Chan, 2014); and (5) Indian Residential Schools (Florence, 2016).

Using the *Righting Canada's Wrongs: Residential Schools* (Florence, 2016) primary source book as a resource – the author's grandfather was a residential school survivor – students explore the devastating impact of Indian Residential Schools on Indigenous Peoples. They conclude their inquiry by assessing the adequacy of Prime Minister Harper's 2008 apology for the Canadian government's role in the Indian Residential School system, and then write a mock letter to a public official expressing their opinion on the topic. Here, unfortunately, is where *Righting Canada's Wrongs* falls short of Reconciliation, since while students are explicitly assessed against Seixas's six concepts for historical thinking, little effort is made to explicitly encourage students to empathise with Indigenous world views or to become allies for change in the present. As was realised after Prime Minister Harper's apology in 2008, words are not enough (Mackey, 2013; Eshet, 2015; Furo, 2018), so composing a letter to a public official – about an action that took place in 2008 – is hardly effective in bringing about change in the present.

While the efficacy of this teaching resource has yet to be evaluated in any empirical way, the adoption of historical thinking concepts as demonstrated in this resource guide does little to disrupt 'the institutional governmental regimes that inscribe a curriculum of dominance' (Ng-A-Fook et al., 2012: 66), since an overwhelming focus is placed upon 'the Government' of the time as principal agents of cultural genocide – rather than society itself (including students' own parents and grandparents), which enabled 'the Government' to take such actions. Hence, in analysing residential schools as an exercise in historical inquiry, there is a pedagogical danger that students will not gain a sense of ethical responsibility. As Miles (2019: 489) found in his inquiry, it cannot be assumed that students will connect the process of historical thinking with their own identities and responsibilities as settler Canadians: 'More attention is required in learning *from* – rather than *about* – Indigenous peoples.'

Speaking Our Truth (Gray Smith, 2017) – For non-Indigenous Canadians, allyship is an important aspect for Reconciliation (Smith et al., 2016; Bishop, 2015; Furo, 2018; Manitowabi, 2020; Ralston Saul, 2008). Within the context of history education, 'allyship' also aligns very well with Rösen's (2007: 18) concept of historical consciousness: 'making sense of the experiences of time by interpreting the past, in order to understand the present and anticipate the future' – in other words, enabling students to make informed decisions in the present, based upon knowledge gained from the past. This is the primary objective of Monique Gray Smith's teaching resource entitled *Speaking Our Truth* (2017). The author

identifies as Cree/Lakota; through a series of four chapters, she shares teachings she has gained on her own 'life journey'. These teachings originate from her relatives, Indigenous Elders, residential school survivors, 'and the many other people who have shared their ideas and wisdom' (Gray Smith, 2017: 9). In this way, Gray Smith presents Reconciliation to her intermediate-grade (aged 11–13) readers as a personal journey, so that together both students and teacher can 'come to terms with the long-term effects of the Residential School system' (p. 9). Through historical accounts, as well as findings from the TRC, students learn what it means to become an ally, and are encouraged to become active in bringing about social justice in the present. Social change in this context includes (among 10 other suggestions) emailing elected officials to ask them what they are doing to foster Reconciliation and to implement the TRC's 94 Calls to Action (p. 124).

The strength of this resource lies in how it presents students with insight into the Indigenous experiences of cultural genocide (across all parts of Canada). Indigenous world views are explored through a pedagogy of the Seven Sacred Teachings, structured around principles of Honesty, Respect, Love, Courage/Bravery, Truth, Humility and Wisdom (Gray Smith, 2017: 24–5). This world view is considered universal to most First Nations Peoples in North America. Although elements of the ethical dimension are present in students' activities, historical thinking is not explicit at all; instead, Gray Smith (2017) presents students with a pedagogy of caring (Barton and Levstik, 2004), and in so doing inadvertently challenges a Eurocentric perspective on the past. It is this type of historical empathy and allyship that seems to be lacking in Gibson et al.'s (2016) *Righting Canada's Wrongs* resource. This also points to an important component of historical thinking that seems to have fallen by the wayside in Canada in recent years (Endacott and Brooks, 2018; Retz, 2018, 2019). As Gray Smith (2017) demonstrates with her teaching resource: 'to engage in meaningful deliberation with those whose ideas differ from our own, we must do more than understand them – we must care about them and about their perspectives' (Barton and Levstik, 2004: 207).

Project of Heart (2019) – A pedagogy of caring is also clearly evident in *Project of Heart*, which is an age-11–15 teaching resource that was developed by Ottawa schoolteacher Sylvia Smith in 2007. Smith's intent was 'to commemorate the lives of the thousands of Indigenous children who died as a result of the residential school experience' (Project of Heart, 2019: n.p.). She has been recognised for her accomplishment with a 2011 Governor General's History Award for Excellence in Teaching, and her programme has since been adopted by educators across Canada with the objectives of:

- expanding opportunities for Indigenous Elders to be heard, recognised and honoured
- changing 'hearts and minds' as Elders give voice to language, values, traditions and teachings that were suppressed by Indian Residential Schools
- building relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples in Canada through 'mutual understanding, respect and collective action to create a different future' (Project of Heart, 2019: n.p.).

Although concepts of historical thinking are not explicitly evident in *Project of Heart* lesson plans, students engage in activities of historical inquiry that support the use of evidence to develop historical perspectives and reach ethical dimensions of understanding. Through a series of six plans, students learn about residential schools, then research the history of one (of more than a hundred and thirty) that operated between 1831 and 1996. As a final activity, they create gestures of Reconciliation (commemorative tiles or feather wreaths) in memory of a specific Indigenous student who attended the school they have researched. Students are also encouraged to invite an Indian Residential School survivor to their classroom to share their experiences; choose a social justice action that supports the TRC Calls to Action; and share their learnings with others in their community or via the internet (Project of Heart, 2019: n.p.). In this context, *Project of Heart* does not actually suggest adopting Indigenous ways of knowing, nor support historical thinking or challenging Eurocentric perspectives on the past; instead, *Project of Heart* lends gestures of support towards 'ReconciliACTION' by encouraging students to do historical research, listen to Indigenous Elders, and become agents of change in the present.

Tupper (2014: 485) has found this teaching methodology to be particularly powerful for creating 'openings for the possibilities of peace'. In this sense, university students who participated in her inquiry were challenged to: 'question their own knowledge and understandings of Aboriginal peoples, historically and today, and to critically respond to meritocratic discourses they had been socialised into, that [position] Aboriginal peoples as responsible for their own social and economic circumstances' (Tupper, 2014: 484). What Tupper describes here is very similar to Simon's (2005: 102–3) historiographic

poetics: juxtapositioning different (first-hand) points of view, or remembrances, as a way of disrupting students' beliefs, thus drawing out personal meaning through victim voice, bringing the past into the present, and enabling societal re-generation through empathy and Reconciliation. Such a learning relationship seems to be missing from Gibson et al.'s (2016) historical thinking resource. What is needed is some sort of middle ground, where students explore multiple sources and perspectives – through explicit use of the six historical thinking concepts – while also respecting Indigenous ways of knowing.

Truth and Reconciliation Curriculum Guides (Ng-A-Fook et al., 2019) – More recently, Nicholas Ng-A-Fook at the University of Ottawa, along with a team of educators including Linda Radford, Sylvia Smith, Kiera Brant-Birioukov and Cindy Blackstock (Ng-A-Fook et al., 2019), have published an extensive 257-page curriculum guide that is designed to encourage both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians to embrace the TRC Calls to Action in their everyday lives (p. 6). Through a series of lesson plans designed for students aged 11–15 (each of which focuses upon a different Indian Residential School at each grade level), students are encouraged to adopt historical thinking strategies. In so doing, they analyse a variety of primary sources that detail Canada's role in the residential school system. They also explore connections between causes for establishing the schools, and ongoing consequences for today's Indigenous communities. In addition, students consider the historical significance of Indian Residential Schools, and reflect upon the ethical dimension of what is required to move forward in Reconciliation. In this way, students are guided through a learning process that is very similar to what Llewellyn and Parker (2018) have referred to as 'ethical relationality', in that they are encouraged to re-position their narrative beliefs about Canada's past, and consider their own role in bringing about change in the present. As the authors explain:

The Guides have been created to speak and relate to the power of teaching and learning through one's heart. This pedagogical approach is widely known as relational learning. This type of learning profiles opportunities for teachers and students not only to use their heads (cognition), but also, their hearts (affect). This kind of learning takes students, indeed all of us, into the heart of difficult knowledge about Canada's settler colonial history of cultural genocide. (Ng-A-Fook et al., 2019: 6)

In such a way, each individual case study is designed to actively challenge Eurocentric perspectives on the past, by encouraging students to look deeper and consider (alternative) Indigenous ways of knowing.

While these lesson plans are explicit in their adoption of historical thinking strategies, the series still falls short of the 'big six' framework, since when students are actually assessed for learning, historical thinking becomes implicit. This raises the pedagogical question as to whether students are *knowingly* engaged in historical thinking. This is an important point, because without the knowledge of knowing *how* and *when* to use the concepts of historical thinking, students are left to their own intuitive devices in examining the past. This also raises the pedagogical question as to whether historical empathy needs to be revisited as a meta concept that has been overlooked in developing the 'big six' framework. Endacott and Brooks (2013, 2018) have indicated that historical thinking must extend beyond analysis of evidence and sources to include an element of reflection (something that is clearly evident in many of the teaching resources discussed in this article). Reflection – Endacott and Brooks (2018: 216) argue – challenges students to consider 'how their understanding of the past might inform their thoughts, emotions, and actions in the present'. Without empathic reflection, as Miles (2019: 489) found in his inquiry, student learning falls short of making connections between Indian Residential Schools in the past, their own identities, and ethical responsibilities for change in the present.

Conclusion

As is evident from the discussions and resources presented in this article, the release of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission report has brought about calls for dramatic reform in how history is taught in Canadian schools. In this paper, I have laid out how we have arrived at this pedagogical crisis in Canada, and how it relates to historical thinking. Given the gravity of what took place within the walls of Indian Residential Schools, and the colonial framework that made such institutions possible, Canada as a society – and educators in particular – can no longer plead ignorance; neither can Indigenous world views be swept aside as irrelevant to historical inquiry. Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission has called for significant reform in education, as a way of disrupting the settler colonial framework that made

Indian Residential Schools (and other acts of cultural genocide) possible. More specifically, the TRC has called for the integration of Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into Canadian classrooms, with the intent of 'Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect' (TRC, 2015a: 7). This requires more than just words of apology.

Historical thinking, although well embedded in the curricula of most provinces and territories, is now challenged with seeking meaningful paths to Reconciliation. As the current array of teaching resources would indicate, however, historical thinking on its own is not enough. Two parallel developments – Reconciliation and historical thinking – have now intersected, and herein lies the challenge: is it possible for two distinct world views to coexist within history education? And, if so, how might each benefit from the other? Certainly, Simon (2013), Battiste (2013) and Marker (2019) would suggest yes – and that each world view has much to offer the other. In a similar vein, Llewellyn and Parker (2018), Tupper (2014), Gray Smith (2017) and Nicholas Ng-A-Fook et al. (2019) demonstrate how the two can indeed coexist – and teach each other. What both Miles (2019) and Dion (2009) suggest, however, is that a disciplinary approach (such as historical thinking) is not enough; as Llewellyn and Parker (2018), Tupper (2014), Gray Smith (2017) and Nicholas Ng-A-Fook et al. (2019) suggest, it is also not enough simply to 'write in' Indigenous history or set Indigenous world views aside as a separate course – as Gibson and Case (2019) have suggested. Such an action does not lend itself to 'Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect' (TRC, 2015a: 7).

What becomes evident from this analysis of prescribed methods for teaching about residential schools and reconciliation in Canada is that, first, educators must do more than simply write Indigenous content into their existing lesson plans; meaningful Reconciliation must involve actions towards ethical responsibility. In addition, Indigenous Peoples must be actively involved in the development of such content – in ways that respect two-eyed seeing. Second, in order to move students towards meaningful Reconciliation, teaching resources must contain empathic opportunities for caring, listening and reflection. Third, as educators, we must not lose sight of the original intention for historical thinking, which was to move students and teachers away from 'History Wars' associated with grand narrative understandings of the past; in working with primary sources, educators must be ever cognisant of Indigenous world views and alternative ways of knowing. Fourth, historical thinking must be made explicit in the classroom, so that students can develop the skills to *knowingly* engage in historical thinking. Last, with the existence of over six thousand witness testimonials to the legacy of Indian Residential Schools, educators would do well to value the role of oral history as a significant starting point for bringing about meaningful change in the present.

In reviewing the current selection of teaching resources, it becomes glaringly clear that more empirical research is required to evaluate the effectiveness of such resources. With the exception of the *Project of Heart* and *Braiding Histories* programmes, few teaching resources have been studied in a qualitative way to determine what narrative beliefs students actually take away from the learning experience. Indeed, while Llewellyn and Parker (2018) found the *Project of Heart* programme beneficial in disrupting student beliefs about the past, both Dion (2009) and Miles (2019) found serious limitations in their disruptive teaching strategies. More empirical research is required in this regard in order to fully understand whether the theoretical intent of each of the lesson plans reviewed here is actually being met in the classroom.

This article represents an exploration of an emerging field of debate around whether historical thinking and Reconciliation are compatible. Does one – as Cutrara (2018) and others suggest – negate the other? While the intent of this paper was to focus on emerging developments in Canada, much could be learned by looking to other nations with regard to how educators elsewhere have faced the teaching of such difficult topics as the Holocaust in Europe, and Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa, Australia or New Zealand. This is the next step on my research journey.

To return to Roger Simon (2005: 88), who asked 'What might it mean to live our lives as if the lives of others truly mattered?', as educators across Canada struggle to respond to this question by forging paths to Reconciliation, we will be challenged to reach beyond well-established colonial perspectives, to decolonise our history education practice, and to disrupt the idealistic notion of a noble past – a notion that is so deeply engraved into the Canadian psyche.

Notes

- ¹ The term 'Indigenous' means 'native to the area', and is thus used in reference to First Nation, Métis and Inuit Peoples of Canada. This term carries the same meaning as 'Aboriginal', although it is used increasingly more often than the latter, since 'Indigenous' has been adopted by the United Nations 'as a self-declared term', while 'Aboriginal' is recognised as 'government imposed' (International Journal of Indigenous Health, n.d.: 5). In this paper, the author uses 'Aboriginal' only within citations.
- ² In total, over 6,750 survivor witness testimonies were collected by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, between 2008 and 2014. Video recordings of many witness testimonies can be accessed on the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (n.d.) website (<http://nctr.ca/map.php>).
- ³ 'Ethical relationality' is a decolonising concept first introduced to Canadian pedagogy by Dwayne Donald (2003) and inspired by the teachings of Kainai (Blackfoot Confederacy) Elders living in southwestern Alberta: 'The process of decolonizing in Canada, on a broad scale and especially in educational contexts, can only occur when Aboriginal peoples and Canadians face each other across deeply learned divides, revisit and deconstruct their shared past, and engage carefully with the realization that their present and future is similarly tied together' (Donald, 2009: 102).
- ⁴ The *KAIROS Blanket Exercise* is a participatory teaching tool, developed by KAIROS Canada in response to the 1996 Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal Peoples. This exercise is designed to develop historical empathy by leading participants through an experience in understanding (and feeling) the denial of Indigenous Peoples' nationhood throughout Canadian history (KAIROS Canada, 2020).

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Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

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Consent for publication statement

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Conflicts of interest statement

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