

Conversation of Images: Navigating Truth and Reconciliation Through the Arts and Education

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Abstract

This article delves into some of the core tenets, aspirations, and objectives of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), emphasizing its significance within the educational realm. Exploring the pedagogical inquiry implications for teachers and teacher educators, it exemplifies a teacher's transformative journey towards embracing and embodying TRC principles. The narrative underscores the potential of arts in exploring TRC's themes and highlights the pivotal role of education in fostering an understanding of reconciliation.

This case study features a partnership between a high school teacher and an Indigenous artist. They collaborate to inspire youth and embrace community engagement alongside various local and Indigenous artists, knowledge keepers, activists, and other community members. The study showcases the impacts of arts in facilitating meaningful conversations on Truth and Reconciliation. This example underscores one teacher's cultural and pedagogical inquiry and its importance on reimagining education as a platform for collaboration, community engagement, and social justice learning.

Keywords: Truth and Reconciliation Commission; community engagement; arts in education; Indigenous perspectives, teacher education

Prologue: Conversation of Images

A mural adorns the side of the Route 11 Creative Art Studio building¹ in Warman, Saskatchewan. It is filled with swirling colors, depictions of natural elements, animals, and human figures. It conveys love, hope, respect, empathy, and intercultural understanding. It represents Call to Action #63² of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Years in the making, persisting through the COVID-19 pandemic, this mural has come to fruition through the hard work of a high school teacher, a local Indigenous artist, and collective community efforts. This visual “conversation of images” (R. Keighley, Personal Interview, 2020) came to life in a meaningful

¹ At the time of the interviews, the arts building was called Route 11 Creative Arts Studio. Since then, the arts center has undergone a name change and is now called “Warman Arts Centre”.

² Call to Action #63 states, “We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education”. The mural specifically addressed Section iii of #63 “Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect”. Goal D of Schedule “N” states: “Provide awareness and public education to Canadians about the IRS system and its impacts.” You can find the Schedule “N” document here: https://www.residentialschoolsettlement.ca/schedule_n.pdf

way that supports Warman's commitment³: to consider Truth and Reconciliation, open dialogue about issues of Indigenous Peoples and "build the capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Call to Action: 63.3).

Introduction

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) emerged from the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) in 2007, Canada's largest class-action settlement.⁴ Instituted in response to prolonged legal battles by survivors of the Indian Residential Schools (IRS) against both the government and affiliated churches, the TRC sought to address the harrowing aftermath and ongoing effects of forced assimilation and maltreatment perpetuated within the residential school system (Beyond 94; Northern Affairs Canada, 2019; Stanton, 2011).

In 2015, the TRC unveiled a report crafted from the mosaic of testimonials, data, analyses, and introspection gathered over the preceding seven years (Beyond 94; Northern Affairs Canada, 2019). The report includes "94 calls to action." Serving as a guiding framework for redress, these imperatives derived from the report are monitored by "Beyond 94," an initiative steered by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) Indigenous Unit.

In this article, I⁵ first explore the core tenets, ambitions, and goals of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, underscoring its relevance in the educational sphere. Secondly, the article explicates one teacher's journey towards a commitment to the TRC goals, and her actions to implement and honor its principles. Examining this teacher's pre-service journey illuminates implications for teachers and teacher educators, while analyzing her current practice accentuates education's pivotal role as key to working towards understanding truth and reconciliation in Canada. Finally, I employ this knowledge to highlight lessons learned from the case study and flag its applicability to a broader audience, namely, those involved in the education field.

Brief History Behind the TRC

Residential schools operated in Canada for more than a century, with the final closure occurring in 1996 (Niessen, 2017). These schools were a governmental strategy to assimilate Indigenous children into non-Indigenous cultures by deliberately erasing Indigenous language and culture (CBC News, 2016). The enforced process included prohibiting native language and cultural practices, separating children from families, disrupting traditional Indigenous life and skills (Stanton, 2011), and perpetrating physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuse (Hanson et al., 2020). The TRC identified this as cultural genocide. The Commission (led by the former Chief Justice Sinclair), intended to address the immeasurable intergenerational harm

³ Discussion of commitment to Truth and Reconciliation is mentioned in the City of Warman, [Mayor and Council blog from March 2020](#) and is evident by the city's leadership in the [Prairie Rivers Reconciliation Committee](#).

⁴ For a more detailed exploration of the history of TRC and the IRSSA settlement, please see Castellano et al., 2008 and Stanton, 2011.

⁵ As a non-Indigenous woman from the US, I come into this project with intersecting identities but none that personally encompass the Canadian or Indigenous experience. I humbly enter the work with an open mind, reflecting on my positionality throughout the data collection, analysis, and writing process. I acknowledge that I was socialized into a western colonial way of thinking. Furthermore, that I am invisibly and visibly socialized and instilled with these values. Yet, I am constantly tackling and trying to make sense of my experience through new lenses which identify racism and colonialism as pervasive features of the North American Society.

caused by the Residential School program and initiate steps towards Reconciliation and Truth (CBC News, 2016). The following section examines the role of education as a key instrument to move towards Truth and Reconciliation.

Education as a Means of Truth

As synthesized by Czyzewski (2001), a comprehensive public education is vital for non-Indigenous individuals to comprehend the profound impacts of colonial systems on entire Nations. The public education system has been scrutinized for its inadequate teaching of Canada's residential school history, adding to a severe lack of knowledge by non-Indigenous people in Canada (Cannon, 2012; Czyzewski, 2011; Madden, 2015; Stanton, 2011). To address this immense gap, the TRC's research and findings should be incorporated into both teacher education programs and public school curricula.

As this case study will illustrate, teachers' self-reflections, and teacher preparation programs can be important in terms of creating equitable practices, but a critical analysis of current educational practices is required also, to address Truth and Reconciliation. The United States and Canada continue to perpetuate educational disparities and assimilation by normalizing whiteness and using curricula that prioritize Anglo-centric history, values, economics, language, religion, and attire (Cannon, 2012; Lees, 2016). Although shifts in educational philosophies are emerging, they remain non-standardized and variable across institutions.

In Canada, progress has been discernible since the 2015 release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report by the federal government. Monitoring of Call 62 by Beyond 94, for example, highlights advancements in Indigenous and Aboriginal content integration in education (both K-12 and post-secondary). Further examination of educational reforms confirms this advancement with curriculum revisions in Ontario's Ministry of Education, collaboration with Indigenous partners on multiple national projects; the mandatory teaching regarding residential schools and treaties in Saskatchewan's social studies courses; and British Columbia's teacher preparation programs mandated credits related to the historical context of First Nation, Inuit, and Métis learners. These developments, recorded on the Beyond 94 platform, underscore positive steps (www.cbc.ca/newsinteractives/beyond-94).

Additionally, numerous Canadian school systems now not only recognize the residential school system and Indigenous perspectives—an integral aspect of the TRC's work—but also mandate their incorporation in the curricula. Saskatchewan's K-12 provincial curriculum illustrates this trend by extensively integrating Indigenous perspectives and TRC's themes. For instance, within the visual arts curriculum, Indigenous perspectives, Treaty Education, and Truth and Reconciliation information are woven into the curriculum in 44 separate instances.⁶

⁶ Example includes: "View and analyze works by Saskatchewan First Nations and Métis artists that convey perspectives on topics related to treaties and relationships (e.g., residential school experiences, this land and resource-related rights, treaty education outcome, TPP10 – investigate issues related to resource development and treaties)" (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, p. 28); and "Examine how historical events (e.g., making traditional art practices illegal) and Eurocentric models of fine art (e.g., art vs craft) marginalized groups of artists (for example, women, First Nations artists, Australian Indigenous artists, gender and sexually diverse artists)" (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, p. 35). See Saskatchewan Curriculum Guide: Visual Art 10, 20, 30 (2019) for complete curriculum guide.

However, the journey is far from complete. While some provinces and territories include Indigenous education and residential school history in their curricula, these efforts vary in terms of extent and mandatory status, since governance of public education is still a provincial matter. The road to equitable education that genuinely acknowledges Indigenous experiences and cultures remains ongoing. The current effort is not always viewed as enough. Cannon (2012), for example, contends that “change means more [than] the mere incorporation of Indigenous culture and worldviews into teacher education programs and other curricula. It also requires that we give thought to racism and work together across our differences” (p. 33).

Czyzewski (2011) aligns with Cannon’s perspective above, by advocating the notion that understanding colonialism involves not just acquiring knowledge but embracing responsibility for the colonial past. Her proposed pedagogical process encompasses acknowledgment, confronting privilege, exploring oppression, fostering confidence, unlearning domination, and enacting social change. As this case study will illustrate, understanding the impacts of the IRS and actively engaging in reconciliation efforts require continuous scrutiny and commitment. Teachers shoulder the responsibility of navigating these stages, potentially through education programs, professional growth, and introspection. Yet, they must also effectively translate these insights into teaching practices, transmitting them to their students with efficacy. In the following section, I present a case study of a teacher who works through the aforementioned commitment to achieving TRC and critical pedagogy.

Case Study: A Partnership in Warman, Saskatchewan

Sarah Gerrard, art, and English teacher at Warman High School⁷ in Saskatchewan, embodies the commitment to genuine acknowledgment and the confronting spirit advocated by Czyzewski (2019) and Cannon (2012). Teaching grades 9-12 since 2006, she initiated a project of professional and personal significance as she desired her students to be authentically engaged with and learn from the community. Collaborating with the local Indigenous artist Ray Keighley, their educational venture focused on guiding students in understanding key concepts associated with the Truth and Reconciliation Report.⁸

During the midst of their project, I conducted a semi-structured interview with each of them to gather insights into their ongoing work.⁹ During the interviews, both Sarah and Ray underscored the significance of their work with Warman High School students and discussed their approaches to exploring the meaning of Truth and Reconciliation. In the subsequent sections, I delve into what I learned from the two interviews. First, I address Sarah’s educational journey, her professional growth, and then move into her intentional social justice pedagogical strategies. Then

⁷ Warman High School was chosen for this case study because Sarah Gerrard (the art and English teacher) secured a grant to explicitly explore Truth and Reconciliation and as such would provide an illuminating case study to understand how education, the arts, and community partnership can pair together for this exploration.

⁸ Sarah Gerrard, Ray Keighley, and Warman High School in Saskatchewan, SK, Canada, are not pseudonyms. The actual names of the people and places in the article are used to acknowledge their contributions and the work’s significance. Permission was granted from the participants and the school’s communication team to publish this information.

⁹ Sarah’s interview took place 9:00 PST on February 20, 2020; Ray’s interview took place February 24, 2020, at 8:00 am PST. Both interviews were conducted via the video communication tool FaceTime, and lasted approximately 45 minutes.

I go into more detail about the partnership between Sarah and Ray, and the eventual outcomes of their work.

Sarah's Journey

While Sarah, a non-Indigenous, white woman, had been cognizant of the need to include Indigenous perspectives in her teaching, she recently felt a pull to examine her authenticity. Fittingly, Sarah sought guidance and collaboration with the community, including seeking the perspectives of Indigenous leaders. Zeichner et al. (2016) assert that teachers must thoroughly learn about their students' communities, foster respectful connections with families, and employ the insights to elevate effective learning. Embracing such notions, Sarah acknowledged the significance of curating meaningful educational experiences that resonated with her students' lived experiences and the communities in Warman.

Sarah's desired introspection, mentioned above, stems from a gradual confluence of significant factors. Firstly, there was her initial teacher education at the University of Saskatchewan (U of S), where she pursued degrees in Education and Studio Arts. Sarah recalls that the required curriculum compelled her self-examination of positionality and privilege. She stated further, that the program fostered a reflective mindset in her teaching practice. Beyond general program requirements, Sarah noted how her learning experiences at the U of S were enriched by specific undergraduate courses¹⁰ which emphasized understanding the significance of anti-racism and anti-oppression. (S. Gerrard, Personal Interview, 2020). Additionally, Sarah attributes her perspective to her mother, who during Sarah's early childhood delved into racism, sexism, and feminism in mental health during her own PhD studies. This focus permeated their family dynamics, instilling awareness of issues of equity and inclusion. Accordingly, Sarah's upbringing fortified her inclination towards exploring identity and privilege during her university years. According to Cannon (2012), self-interrogation is a preliminary yet vital stride in understanding reconciliation. Furthermore, Czyzewski (2011) attests that decolonization and reconciliation are "lofty goal[s]" that require "confidence-shaking... [and] recognize[s] privilege as a societal position granted via prejudice and racial bias" (p. 3). Beginning that self-interrogation is an example of the "confidence-shaking" mentioned by Czyzewski (2012) and a way to fathom societal dynamics and one's individual stance (Cannon, 2012).¹¹

Sarah's undergraduate and family experiences shaped her self-perception within society's broader context and instigated her voyage of self-interrogation, vital for addressing racism and oppression (Cannon, 2012; Czyzewski, 2011). The synergy of identity exploration and courses in Native Education within her teacher education program resonate with Madden's (2015) call for support of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers to see themselves "affected by, implicated in, and accountable for shifting education towards local Indigenous priorities and solutions" (p. 2).

¹⁰ Sarah talked about specific classes such as: "335 First Nations and Cross-Cultural Education" Foundations Course, emphasizing anti-racism and anti-oppression. "Native Studies 100 - Foundation in Native Studies," which has now evolved into courses such as "EFDT 265.3 Foundations for First Nations Metis and Inuit Teaching and Learning" and "ECUR 265.3 Teaching for Reconciliation in the K-12 Curricula" (University of Saskatchewan).

¹¹ At the time of interview, the courses at U of S were titled "Native Studies" classes, but they are now referred to as "Indigenous Studies" classes and programming.

While her university classes initiated a critical lens concerning identity, privilege, and equity, it was during her teaching career that the practical application of her knowledge crystallized. An example she shared was working with a colleague who favored teaching the classic English literature, because it was more easily integrated into the curriculum and accepted by staff and students. However, upon reflection, Sarah said that she noticed a dearth of diverse voices in the English curriculum. As she articulated, “the majority of the authors were old white men” (S. Gerrard, Personal Interview, 2020). While Sarah had included diverse content in her teachings, this experience rattled her. She decided to examine *why* she taught in this way. Ultimately, she realized that her teaching philosophy was grounded in social justice, believing “teachers should include diverse authors and artists to help stretch students’ understanding of their own and others’ experiences in the world” (S. Gerrard, Personal Interview, 2020). Sarah wanted to examine if this notion was truly reflected in her teaching practice. She describes the self-reflective process as a major part of her Master’s degree in Curriculum Studies (discussed next).

Sarah’s Masters in Curriculum Studies marked a pivotal chapter in her teaching career. During this program, Sarah recalls being pushed to be a reflective practitioner. Sarah emphasizes that the program required a “personal connection” with her work in teaching and her educational philosophy. The guidance urged her to “zoom back” to realign elements in her practice to uphold her educational philosophy more effectively (S. Gerrard, Personal Interview, 2020).

As such, Sarah diligently incorporated diverse viewpoints into her English and art classes. However, she questioned if this was adequate to foster genuine discussion and inclusion. Sarah aimed to ensure that she and her students engaged in meaningful experiences which delved into issues of injustice and inclusion, connecting classroom to community. In this spirit, she collaborated with the City of Warman to produce a public mural project illustrating the town’s history. For Sarah, integrating Indigenous perspectives into the history mural of the City wasn’t just necessary, but the very essence of the endeavor. Following, I will share how Sarah endeavored to centre Indigenous perspectives in the project.

Building Connections: Mural 1 Leads to Lasting Relationships

Sarah knew she could not embark on this journey alone, saying “if I am just a white teacher commenting on Indigenous education, then that’s really oppression.” Reflecting on her positionality, she sought guidance from both an Indigenous artist and an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper, consulting them throughout her students’ creative process of developing and making the mural. The resulting art creation was visually striking and held deep significance for Warman, but the experience was transient. As a result, Sarah wanted to establish more enduring connections benefiting the community and her students.

Sarah and Ray Keighley, the local artist with whom Sarah consulted on the mural, both believed that the work was beneficial to the students and the broader local community of Warman. Inspired to continue, they collaborated to secure an Artists in Schools’ – Residency Grant from the Saskatchewan Arts Board. Their focus of inquiry was: “How can we connect to Truth and Reconciliation and what does it mean for us?” This grant marks another stride towards answering the call from TRC of embedding TRC’s work within educational systems, while fostering lasting connections and understanding within the community.

Creating Knowledge Together

Supported by the grant, Ray and Sarah cultivated classroom interactions, an art curriculum, and culturally sustaining projects which were enriched by guest speakers and community engagement. In this strong partnership, Sarah and Ray co-created the student's experience, knowledge and understanding. This co-creation communicates the power of collective community expertise, skills, and perspectives, as profound contributions to the student's learning and experience (Zeichner et al., 2016).

The impact of the Artists in Schools' – Residency program extended to approximately 500 students. The students' journey commenced with a medicinal walk at a Heritage Park, where students learned about plant medicinal properties. They took photographs and created drawings incorporating Cree or Métis plant names. They later ventured into the meaning of Truth and Reconciliation in terms of water inequality. Through art they explored inequality by reflecting on urban areas' ease of access to clean water, versus reservations that were grappling with the need for prolonged and continuing advisories to boil water. In alignment with the TRC's Call #63, this educational arts project wove in themes of inequity, oppression, and Indigenous rights. Extending their social justice artwork, after learning about pop art and appropriation, students crafted prints highlighting Indigenous social justice issues under Sarah and Ray's guidance.

Although guided by Ray's artistic expertise, Ray views his role as multidimensional. He is an artist, a speaker, a teacher, and a learner. Ray has been in the classroom in a variety of capacities and students attended his studio to see more of his work and his creative process. He has been able to: share his spiritual beliefs with classes, tell First Nations legends, consult on curriculum and culturally sustaining pedagogy, and instruct classroom lessons. Just as importantly, he says, is his involvement as a participant, learning and exploring Truth and Reconciliation alongside everyone (R. Keighley, Personal Interview, 2020).

Ray stresses that grasping Truth and Reconciliation necessitates understanding relevant First Nations history and related issues. Ray aspires that this project will heighten students' awareness of contemporary Indigenous concerns. He aims to counteract marginalization by fostering better engagement with the key issues through his work with the students. Ray states that he knows it becomes "too easy to marginalize First Nations People and their issues" (R. Keighley, Personal Interview, 2020), and sees his work with the students as having a counter effect.

In addition to Ray's consistent presence and collaboration with Sarah, they engaged various Indigenous community speakers, including filmmakers, beading artists, a Cree teacher, writers, artists, a medicinal Knowledge Keeper, and a theater group, to discuss Truth and Reconciliation and Indigenous culture at the school. A significant moment occurred when an esteemed community member and Indigenous Knowledge Keeper, integral in guiding Sarah, Ray, and students, addressed a school assembly, sharing personal stories with the students and staff (around 700 students and staff members). In Sarah's view, this experience profoundly connected the school with the larger TRC narrative, and left a lasting impression on her (S. Gerrard, Personal Interview, 2020).

Furthermore, Sarah and Ray have moved beyond the classroom to connect students and the community. For example, Sarah and Ray along with other staff and students joined a group walking from Saskatoon to Prince Albert to bring awareness concerning the missing and murdered Indigenous women. The project also included plans to bring students to a pow-wow, a medicine walk, and a traditional sweat.¹² Through the above-mentioned art and activist learning experiences, Sarah and Ray worked through their stated and explicit inquiry, namely “How can we connect to Truth and Reconciliation and what does it mean for us?” However, they wanted also, to engage with something lasting and meaningful to members of the larger community, with whom they had been working so closely. Next, I will discuss how they began to build a lasting landmark in Warman.

Moving Forward: A Lasting Landmark

To find means of making a lasting impression, Sarah and Ray embarked on the creation of a **second public mural**, this time in a direct response to their guiding question, “How can we connect to Truth and Reconciliation and what does it mean for us?” Their work addresses the TRC Call to Action #63.¹³ Sarah and Ray’s goal is to explore Truth and Reconciliation and convey why Aboriginal education is important and necessary for *all* education. They worked together with other community members to unpack the meaning of their question. Importantly, they brought together Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members of Warman into the thinking and learning process, including art-building involving board members, city council members, an RCMP officer, members of a Reconciliation Committee, and a Native studies teacher. Together they carefully analyzed how to explore important issues regarding education examined by the TRC. The collaboration with community members illustrates how to build an understanding of what is important to the community by amplifying community voices and enlivening their message (Zeichner et al., 2016).

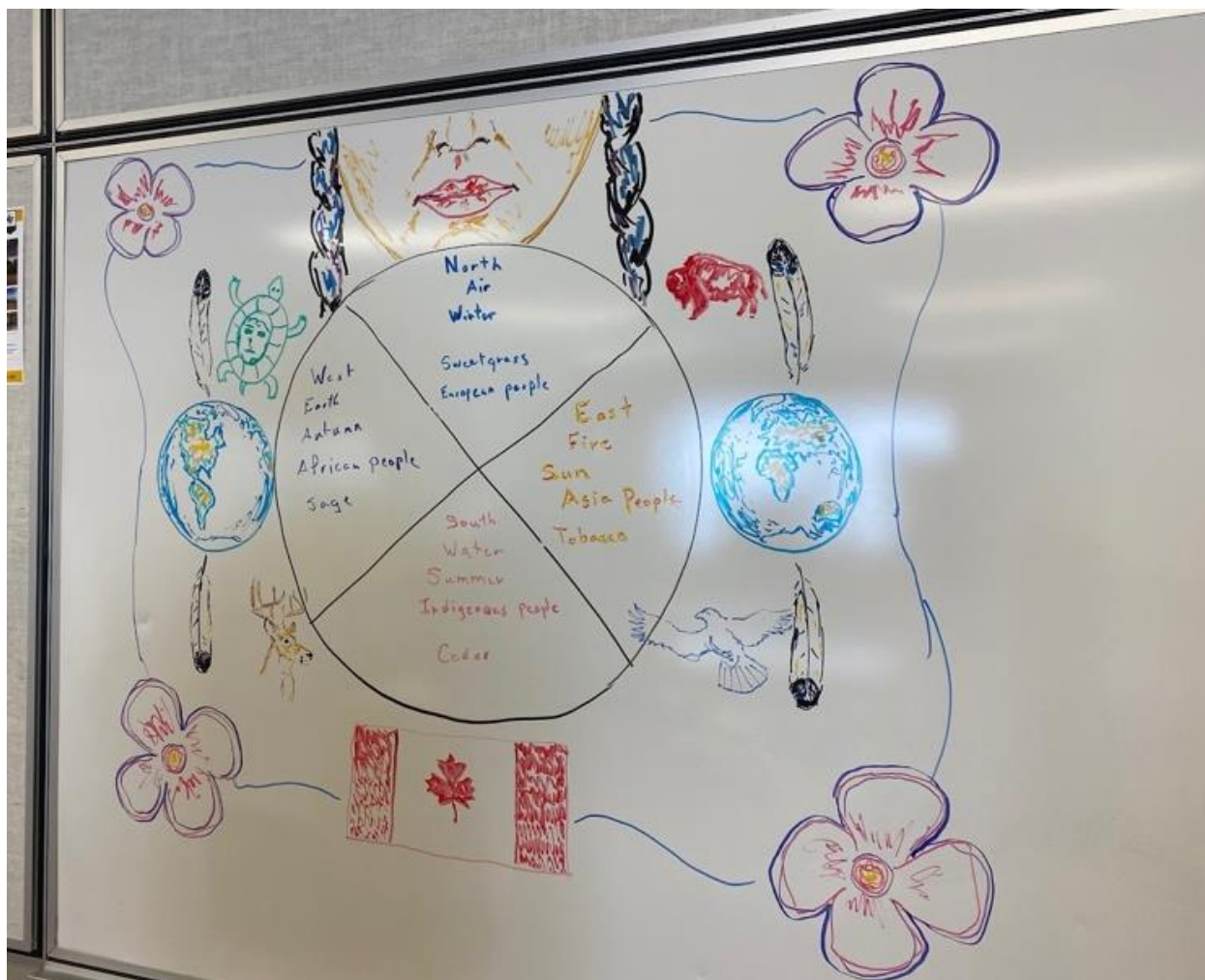
As they moved forward with the second mural process, Ray worked closely with the students to bring to life their images and incorporate them into the final mural design. (See sample of photographs in the following pages). In addition to this project, they have worked with Route 11 Creative Art Studio, a local art collaborative, to house a student art show for a month. It was a retrospective of students’ work and reflections on their exploration of Truth and Reconciliation. Through their reflections (in the interviews conducted), Ray and Sarah explored the significance of the work, but also the challenges and tensions, which I will discuss next.

¹² Due to COVID-19 precautions during 2020, some of these events were postponed, canceled, or altered.

¹³ Call 63.3: “We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including... [Number] iii: Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect”.



Brainstorming initiates the mural creation process
(Photo courtesy of Sarah Gerrard)



Initial Mural Design
Sketch by Ray Keighley
(Photo courtesy of Sarah Gerrard)



Further brainstorming of Mural Design

Sketch by Ray Keighley

(Photo courtesy of Sarah Gerrard)



Final Mural on the side of the Route 11 Arts Building
(Photo courtesy of Sarah Gerrard)



Final Mural on the side of the Route 11 Arts Building

(Photo courtesy of Sarah Gerrard)

Challenges, Tensions, Magnitude

Navigating the exploration of Truth and Reconciliation through art is an important yet complex approach. For Sarah and Ray, it is a rigorous and profound experience. For their students, it demands courage and hard work while pushing some students into uncomfortable territory. Sarah explained, conversations can get intense. She noted some initial hesitation from students asking, “why are we doing this?” and some lingering dismissive remarks including “why are we learning about ‘them’ again” (a non-Indigenous student referring to Indigenous content). Although there was some resistance, Sarah said many students embrace TRC exploration.

Ray welcomes both the embrace and the push-back. He sees the push-back as a sign of engagement, saying “if you’re pushing back at least you’re talking” (R. Keighley, Personal Interview, 2020). For Ray, conversation is the purpose of this project and so he sees it as productive. This dialogue-driven perspective aligns with Dion’s (2009) critique of conventional education, which she claims often evokes emotional responses without probing the root causes or

fully addressing the suffering and injustice. The students at Warman High School, by delving into TRC history and racism's systemic underpinnings through their art, go beyond mere reactions, to engaging in meaningful conversations and investigations.

Conversations and exposure to the TRC and social justice issues hold universal importance, but they hold unique significance for Indigenous students. A common theme that Ray and Sarah both spoke of was that throughout the project, conversations emerged that may not have happened otherwise. Significantly, conversations centered Indigenous students' perspectives, honored Indigenous knowledge, and recognized the lasting impact of colonization. Sarah recalls for instance, that studying the work of a Metis artist, opened up a conversation on local Metis communities and made personal connections for at least one of the students.

The art experience prompted students to talk about their familial and cultural connections, proudly noting their affiliation. This example illustrates how this TRC project can work to counter the disconnect often found between the Indigenous students' community culture and the school culture (Lees, 2016; Madden, 2015; Zeichner et al., 2016). Tellingly, the traditional gap between community and school cultures was revealed. Both Sarah and Ray reported examples of students "hiding it [their Indigeneity]", or how some demonstrated being "afraid to say they are part Native" (S. Gerrard & R. Keighley, Personal Interview, 2020). Encouragingly, exploring TRC through the arts opened spaces and conversations, offering Indigenous students opportunities to explore their Indigenous cultures and to bridge the disconnect between their own culture and the school culture (Lees, 2016; Madden, 2015; Zeichner et al., 2016). Thus, Ray and Sarah are fostering not only student understanding but also empowerment, by striving to honor Indigenous heritage within the school's environment.

Since the time of this writing, Ray and Sarah have remained committed to the creative process. They rode the waves of movement, transition, and growth of this project. They endured multiple delays and pandemic related setbacks. After much work and anticipation, the mural was completed and currently stands in place. Does this sense of completion bring an end? Will their students graduate and move on, which signals that they are done with this project, done with the inquiry of Truth and Reconciliation? Sarah thinks not. She says:

Going into this project, we knew that the topic of Truth and Reconciliation was broad and amorphous, but after working with the students, community members, and guest speakers, we have realized that the scope of Truth and Reconciliation is never-ending and almost overwhelming. You really have to let go of the idea that there is an "end point" or finished product that will be realized. Through this process-based learning we have also realized just how different everyone's starting points are, and how much their interest [or] resistance affects their growth as we move through this process.

Sarah's unwavering commitment to obtaining and meticulously implementing the Artists in Schools – Residency Grant underscores her dedication to exploring Truth and Reconciliation. She tackled deconstructing the past and critically examining the future, while learning with Indigenous people which is central to decolonization and reconciliation (Scully, 2012).

Working in Solidarity: Teachers, Students, and Community

Sarah aimed to create an authentic and transformative educational experience for herself, her students, and their community. She employed an “experiential lens” (S. Gerrard, Personal Interview, 2020) integrating history, social justice, Indigenous culture, literature, art, and guest speakers. This approach aligns with pedagogy for decolonizing (Madden, 2015), challenging misrepresentations and emphasizing collaboration between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians (Scully, 2012). Her collaboration with community members exemplifies an “engagement approach” and even hints at a “solidarity approach” to school-community relationships (Zeichner et al., 2016), as discussed next.

Zeichner et al. (2016) present three school-community relationship approaches: involvement, engagement, and solidarity.¹⁴ Beyond mere involvement, Sarah’s approach clearly aligns with engagement which values community knowledge and history in schools. The Warman High School example driven by TRC principles promotes awareness and diversity understanding, echoing the engagement approach’s essence. Furthermore, Zeichner et al. (2016) highlight the depth of the solidarity approach, addressing broad structural inequities. Sarah’s project confronts systemic racism and supports reconciliation through activism, aligning closely with the solidarity approach. Her work demonstrates a commitment to transformative, collaborative educational experiences beyond the classroom, emphasizing both engagement and solidarity.

These social-justice experiences are likely to have an impact on Sarah’s students (Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004), especially since Sarah and Ray prompt the student’s critical reflection (Asghar & Rowe, 2017). However, as discussed next, it is not only the student who may be impacted by Warman High School’s TRC exploration, there is potential for the wider community to receive a lasting impact as well.

Social Movement and Community Significance

The Truth and Reconciliation mural serves as a powerful means to connect Warman High School and the community, by fostering a diverse conversation about the TRC and its Calls to Action. It provides authentic experiences that honor Indigenous history and knowledge. While this example pertains to a specific Canadian high school, it aligns with the ideals of community-centered education, supported by research, scholars, teachers, and educators. Sarah and Ray’s journey showcases the challenges and triumphs of social justice education and community engagement. Despite its complexity, Ray noted the emergence of “strange and wonderful things” (R. Keighley, Personal Interview, 2020) in their efforts. Both Sarah and Ray emphasize the project’s necessity to spur student conversations about Truth and Reconciliation but also the benefit to the community with the production of the mural.

¹⁴ According to Zeichner et al. (2016), the involvement approach is school-centric and mostly concentrated on one-way communication of schools and staff sharing their knowledge with families and community. An engagement approach stresses the knowledge that families, and community mentors can impart to teachers and schools. The solidarity approach is built from an understanding that educational inequalities stem from broad, deep, and racialized structural inequalities. This approach strives to incorporate the lived experiences, untapped insights, and knowledge of community.

Significantly, the initiation of the project is rooted in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's research, findings, and report, driven by the Canadian government's attempt to address past atrocities and mend relations with Indigenous communities. While Sarah's grassroots partnership with the Warman community exemplifies a bottom-up approach, the newly implemented provincial curriculum mandating TRC recommendations, underscores governmental backing. We also see evidence of its effect through legislation (*Beyond 94: Truth and Reconciliation in Canada*), curricular remodels (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2019), and resources developed for teachers (Government of Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2018; Ng-A-Fook, 2017; University of Regina, 2017). This emphasis on education offers a ray of hope for fostering a generation that recognizes the strength in all voices, stands against systemic racism, and collaborates towards achieving social justice.

Conclusion

Sarah, Ray, and their transformative efforts at Warman High School epitomize the art of solidarity within a community. In her educational journey, Sarah's collaboration with Ray has been a watershed moment, a powerful lesson in reaching out and nurturing enduring community partnerships. Sarah's resolute dedication has given us insight into the tenacity required to actualize such endeavors and the remarkable outcomes that blossom from nurturing a school's community fabric.

Through this case study, Sarah and Ray demonstrate how community engagement stretches far beyond the confines of the high school walls and the academic calendar. By eschewing the quest for an 'end point or finished product', as Sarah noted, it led to an enduring journey with a dedication to embedding TRC principles throughout their sustained efforts. Their example urges educators at large to scrutinize the origins of curricula, lessons, research, and policy. In essence, this narrative prompts us to reimagine education not as a solitary realm, but as a nexus of collaboration and community engagement. As we forge ahead, may we heed Sarah and Ray's profound lesson – that unifying to unpack social justice issues, and creating collective purpose can revolutionize education to work towards Truth and Reconciliation.

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I am also deeply grateful for the self-development that they have helped me to embark on during my research (the information gathering stages regarding their project). Sarah and Ray have helped me to continue my learning journey, as I strive to understand my positionality and my relationships with (anti)racism and (de)colonization.

I would also like to acknowledge both Ray and Sarah for the work they are doing at Warman High School (Warman, Saskatchewan, Canada), and the vital meanings that they are bringing to their students as they explore Truth and Reconciliation collectively.

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