

## Reconciling the Future Starts Right Now

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It's good to be here. It's a good day to be on this side of the grass. That, along with most of what you will read here, is what I said at a conference of Indigenous scholars. However, as I am editing the transcript several months later, I cannot resist adding new material and making some changes in hopes of being helpful to readers.

I'm grateful to hear and read the writings of the new generation of scholars that are coming up, and to hear them each speaking in their own voice as a unique gift of the universe to itself and to the rest of us. Earlier in the day, at the Indigenous Scholars conference, I allowed myself to hear the student presentations, and to enjoy and to feel deeply about what they were saying. I heard who they are and what we as Indigenous people are doing with this concept of reconciliation. Once again, we're claiming something and remaking it into our own. And it's inspiring to hear younger scholars and know that the future looks brighter because of them.

There's something that feels so good about being here—Treaty 6 territory, the meeting place at the bend of the river, the University of Alberta. Looking at this room, when I walked in, felt like coming home with all the coloured cloth on the posts. The ribbons on the doorway reminded me of the respect that I feel for the people of this place, and the people that I've met here, and the people who have built a legacy for the future in this place, on this land. And then, as people spoke, I thought about and realized what Willie Ermine talked to me about once. He said, "One of the meanings of respect, one of the reasons for respect, is I respect you because your ancestors are standing behind you." I respect you because of all of your ancestors that are standing behind you.

### *What Does Reconciliation Mean?*

As I began to think about an Indigenous perspective on reconciliation, some things came immediately to my mind. The first thing, of course, is that reconciliation is a verb. Well, no, it's a noun in English [laughs]. But what changes if we turn it into a verb? A lot of our languages are verb-

based, but nouns are persons, places, things. What kind of a thing is reconciliation, and can I hold it in my hands? Can I sit it on the shelf and then take it off when I want to use it? Or is it a verb? So, I started thinking in my mind about reconciliation as a verb—to reconcile. And then I thought about, what are we reconciling?

And I wanted to ask you, and I can't help myself, I've got to ask you, how many of you regularly reconcile your chequing account? [laughter]. Oh, wonderful. I'm filled with admiration. It is an important task in this day and age. I remember my Mom caught the bank in an error when I was a little kid. And she went into the bank and explained to them their error, and I was a little kid beside her. And here's my Mom talking to the bank manager, telling him that they made an error in our account. I was so proud of my Mom. Banks make mistakes. So, kudos to those of you who reconcile your banking account. That's one meaning to the word.

But that's not really the kind of reconciling we are talking about because the errors we have to reconcile are much too large and heart-wrenching to ever square the books. The kind of reconciling I think we're talking about is human to human, human to animal, human to the land. And there is history within the word reconcile. As we should know, dictionaries are not law books. They are history books. They tell us how words have been used in the near past. So, I looked up *reconcile* in a history book called the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* (2005) and found five meanings:

1 make friendly again after an estrangement. 2 [usu. in reflexive or passive; foll. by to] make acquiescent or contentedly submissive to (something disagreeable or unwelcome): was reconciled to failure. 3 settle (a quarrel etc.). 4 harmonize; make compatible. 5 show the compatibility of by argument or in practice: cannot reconcile your views with the facts.

One obvious commonality to all the dictionary definitions of reconcile is that they all are about relationships. So, I feel that I can safely say that we are talking about relationships. Reconciling is about the quality of our lives because quality of life is the quality of our relationships.

Unfortunately, none of those dictionary meanings are good enough for the children of our future. It is not only that we have to reconcile ourselves to the facts of what actually was and is. We also have the amazing creative ability to influence, that is, to reconcile the future. It is up to us, our actions together, to establish what reconcile shall mean in the dictionaries of the future.

### *But Heartlessness Continues*

A number of scholars, such as Kim (2014) and Christjohn and Wasacase (2009), have pointed out problems with the meaning of *reconciliation* as used in Canada with our Truth and Reconciliation Commission. So, as we

look at what it might mean in current and future practice, it is well to understand that if not done right, that potentially beautiful word of reconciliation may serve as a cover for continued structural violence or worse.

Certainly, the Canadian government's continued discrimination against Indigenous children as detailed by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (*First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada et al v Attorney General of Canada, for the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada*, 2016) is inconsistent with both Canada's apology for residential schools and any sincere commitment to reconciliation. However, government is neither static nor monolithic, and the Canadian public is even less so. Government's decision to accept the Human Rights Tribunal's finding, as well as its announced commitment to the TRC's Calls to Action and The United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Rights, could lead to real improvements. But it is not automatic and it will not be easy.

All of us, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people of this and other lands who care about children, fairness, and all that will live on after we die, should have no illusions about the nature and viciousness of the ongoing pathologies that created residential schools in the first place (Borrows, 2016; Razack, 2015; Rifkin, 2013). All of us should have no illusions about those pathologies, because the residential schools were symptoms of a pathology that threatens us all.

I am not sure what to call the underlying pathology that produced civilizations around the globe that repressed at home, and fiercely and joyously went out to conquer and exploit their neighbours (Diamond, 1974). Diamond just called it *civilization*. I am a bit uncomfortable with that name, because I don't reject the good things that civilization has created and because I believe that there is some evidence that civilization need not be pathological. So, provisionally, I am naming this pathology that infects our global civilization *heartlessness*.

Heartlessness is what I am calling the pathology that gave us the colonization that produced Indian residential schools. And, I am guessing that heartlessness grows out of and/or is a perversion of what I'm calling the culture of fear. But first we need to try to dodge, at least for now, the religious and all too human questions of guilt, repentance, atonement, and reconciliation.

I am not talking about who is wrong and who is right or who has suffered more or less. Too often, that is itself a heartless debate. Even though great wrongs were done, a debate about who is right and who is wrong doesn't seem to work. So, let's set aside, at least for now, all the variations of who is right. I've been wrong many times. I'm just telling you the truth as I think I know it of what seems to work so far.

For years, I have been attempting to find or develop (at least for myself) a little story, or maybe a simple little theory, that might explain in a personally and interpersonally useful way how relationships in and between our groups can go wrong and how inter-group and intra-group relations might become better and more productive. Of course, many scholars have addressed similar questions about how and why individuals, institutions, governments, and societies can go as wrong, as they often have throughout human history. Solutions have been proposed.

Maybe I should just call it the problem of evil and go back to the Book of Job in the Bible, and maybe throw in a dash of Buddhism. But, as much as I draw value from and respect the many ways that others have worked with similar questions, there seems to be no substitute for doing my own work on Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations and asking you, if you are so inclined, to think and feel your way through getting closer to the truth of what was, is, and could be.

#### *The Pipe Ceremony and Relationships*

Earlier today I said that the pipe clarifies our relationship with the universe. One of the names for the pipe is *makes our prayers visible*. With our eyes and minds, we can see that we live in a give-and-take relationship with life itself. With our lungs, we can feel ourselves accepting the breath of life. What about the heartless pathology that has touched everyone? I know what it is to feel and act heartless. Maybe you do, too. I know what heartfelt action feels like, too. I'm betting big time that you do, too.

When I noticed that inhaling was me accepting the gift of life, I felt something like an attitude of gratitude. So, in my mind I said, "thank you." That led to casting around for what to think when I exhaled, what was it I was feeling and thinking when I gave back? I thought about the plants that use carbon dioxide and just said, "Giving." But that didn't feel exactly right. Wordless is good, but sometimes the right words at the right time help. The answer that satisfied me came from my three-year-old granddaughter, Rochabelle.

My wife and I were sitting on our bed upstairs talking and playing with our two-year-old granddaughter, Evelyn. Her sister, Rochabelle, came running up the stairs and charged into the room with two cookies. As she handed one of her cookies to Evelyn, she said in her beautiful, high, and bright three-year-old voice, "Here you go." So, now, I occasionally take a few moments to accept the gift of life with a heartfelt thank you and give back, hearing the childish music of generosity in my 73-year-old thought of "Here you go."

For me, the pipe is a symbol of the sacredness of our gift of a relationship with life, a relationship of accepting and giving. It tells us that our life literally depends on giving and receiving, on inhaling and exhaling. That is a teaching about the physicality and heartfulness of life that our minds can readily comprehend. The pipe is about relatedness. It is about right relationship. That is why it is sometimes called a peace pipe. It was used when some treaties were signed. The late James Iron Eagle, whose relative was there for the Treaty 4 negotiations, often said in my presence that "the Treaties were not about money. They were about Nature." James repeated that often enough in different contexts that I finally understood that by Nature he meant something like or maybe the same thing as what the late Lionel Kinuwa meant when he talked about Natural Law. It is the same in Leroy Little Bear's talks and writing, and in John Borrows' books.

While very few would openly defend colonialism, many more would be loathe to dismantle the benefits they receive from it. Colonisation hangs like a shadow in the background of discussions about its continuing existence ... If its benefits and unequal application were more thoroughly acknowledged, the implications of practical reconciliation would be more fully apparent. (Borrows, 2005, p. 644)

#### *A Fair, Sustainable, Just Future for All*

There are Canadians in all walks of life who want a fair, sustainable, and just future for all. Some, like Professor Emeritus Michael Asch of the University of Alberta, are asking what I believe are great questions. As a self-identified Settler, he asks, "What, beyond the fact that we have the numbers and the power to insist on it, authorizes our being here to stay?" (Asch, 2014). I like questions but I love that one. It is honest in that it acknowledges that Settlers are here by dint of power and numbers. And we both know they are not leaving. Asch asks and struggles with his question because the answer matters to people of honour, people who care about justice, morality, ethics, and the world we bequeath to the next generation. Is there an honourable way to be a Settler? Asch's answer is a contingent "yes." His research suggests that Alexander Morris, Queen Victoria's Treaty Commissioner, negotiated in good faith. Morris' opposition to Ottawa's bad faith breach of treaties was unsuccessful. However, the Supreme Court's decisions that the "honour of the crown" is at stake makes me think that the Settler's honour depends on enacting the spirit and intent of treaties.

Please consider with me that our honour, whether as Settler, Indigenous, Immigrant, Refugee, or some combination, is at stake. Our honour as humans requires us to work with those who are willing to achieve a better future for all our children. In Spirit and intent, the treaties between the

Crown and the Indigenous peoples of Canada do not detract from, but enhance, both the rights and responsibilities of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians.

Relationships go wrong sometimes. George Ainsworth-Land (1986) said that, in human relationships, one plus one never equals two, it always equals either more than two, or less. As human beings, we have been called social animals. We live in groups, we come from relationships. Our lives consist of relationships. The whole quality of our lives is determined by relationships. So when important relationships go sideways over into the minus column we suffer and it calls for reconciling. And it is important to know that the suffering, whether we know it or not, goes both ways. If I treat you as less, I hurt you and myself at the same time. We both suffer differently and we need different healing. True reconciliation would provide for that differential healing. Reconciling is about healing relationships. And, it is about much more than healing. Truth, an open mind to see what was and is, is a prerequisite.

As I speak to you, there is a banner on the wall behind me with pictures and a timeline of residential school history. The banner calls that history "100 years of loss." And it is true except that "loss" is too passive, too kind a word. It was not a loss: it was a taking, a genocidal taking of our children. All kinds of pain and suffering, real life and death tears of our children, are part of that 100 years of residential school history. And that's the occasion of this talk.

#### *The Process of Truth and Reconciliation*

Years ago, I was talking to Grandpa about a psychology course I was taking at university. Part of that course was about brainwashing, torture, concentration camps, re-education, and prisoner of war experiences. Grandpa said, "We are prisoners of peace." The residential schools, in fact, were not schools. The residential "schools" were re-education centres for children intended to eradicate Indigenous peoples as peoples. Residential schools were "abominations of humanity" inflicted on children.

I thought about South Africa and their truth and reconciliation processes. And I thought about, well, geez, what if Poundmaker got elected Prime Minister? Then we could have some truth and reconciliation in Canada, maybe. Or how about Louis Riel? What in fact do we have?

We are talking about truth and reconciliation because of the largest class action lawsuit in Canadian history. Survivors of the residential schools sued Canada and the churches for the evils of residential school policy and practice. We could say that Canada and the churches fought that lawsuit, tooth and nail, but we have advanced from trial by physical



combat to trial by verbal combat. So, they fought with lawyers, bureaucrats, and money. The government and churches finally settled and part of the settlement was the formation of a "truth and reconciliation" commission. I have quotes around those words because there are undeniable problems with the TRC process as implemented by Canada.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has produced a report complete with 94 Calls to Action. We do have a basis for action. In the words of the TRC, we are called to "reconcile the future." We do need open minds to see enough of the crimes of the past and present. But open minds are not enough: we also need open hearts to hear each other, open wills to work together, to do what justice as well as compassion demands; and, we need open spirits, chastened by knowledge, for the mutually-inspired creativity that changes the march of history.

Mary Parker Follett distinguished between power over and power with: "it is possible to develop the conception of power-with, a jointly developed power, a coactive, not a coercive power" (Follet, 1924, p. 101). In our families, in our cities, nationally, internationally, with Mother Earth herself, we have a desperate need to learn reconciliation. We need the courage of open minds to see what was and is, and we need the courage of open hearts to hear what the other is saying, to feel empathy. We have countless opportunities to get better at reconciliation. Let's try not to waste them. Reconciling the future with Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians occurs in an ethical space (Ermine, 2007) that has its own importance but also is a place where honourable people can learn to work together for all the sake of all our grandchildren. It is only together that we can learn and practice power with, not power over.

"If you are not doing it with them, you are doing it to them" (personal communication, Don Wells, former President of the University of Regina, circa 1993).

We could read the past as the relentless march of history, as conquest, exploitation, repression. We could read that power makes itself right and marches on. We could misread Darwin and enact "social Darwinism." Constantine turned Christianity from the teachings of the Prince of Peace to a weapon of conquest. As Indigenous people we could vanish, as indeed many beautiful peoples have vanished back into the blood-stained soil of Mother Earth. But we have not vanished and we are determined that we will not. We are humans facing other humans. Empires rise and fall. Humans have, thus far, persisted.

We have persisted; we can do better. For God and all our children's sake, it is not about "white guilt." It may be guilt of empires or the guilt of hateful systems, or the guilt of our all too human complicity with inhu-

manity. The war is not between the white "race" and the other "races," nor is it a war at all. It is a challenge. What must humans be in order that our children may live? Is humanity sustainable? The answer is "no" if we continue as we are. You and I and everyone are related to everything that is, and it is up to us to determine the quality of relationship, the quality of truth and reconciliation, that we enact between each other, between men and women, between us and the biosphere.

Truth and reconciliation—I heard that idea coming from South Africa. But now, in Canada, as Willie Littlechild said, "Everyone deserves the truth" (personal communication, forum on the TRC report at the University of Alberta, circa 2013). We all deserve the truth of what was and is. We should value and respect the courage and effort it takes to face difficult truth. Some of the truth about the crime of residential school policy and practice is out and available. The truth about what was. The truth of what is the present is even harder to face. There are more Aboriginal children "in care" now than there ever were in residential schools. As I write this, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal has just ruled that the Canadian government is discriminating against Aboriginal children. That is our present reality.

#### *Reconciling Starts with Self*

Reconciliation is about the future, "reconciling the future." There's all the unfinished, leftover business of the past that has been, along with current discriminations accumulated into this present moment, where we sit right now. And the reason it's worth facing the truth is for the future. And the future is not tomorrow. The future starts right now, as you read these words. It's our future relationships that we're talking about. And the relationships of our children, and our grandchildren, and our communities. We're not going to change the past. What we must change is the future, and we can only change it together.

So, for me as an Indigenous person trying to come to terms with reconciling, I like so much what somebody at the Indigenous scholars conference said very early on, and other people repeated it. Reconciling starts with the self. Starts with us. Starts with me. Each of us starts with some internal work that quickly reaches out to others. Coming from an Indigenous epistemology, an Indigenous way of knowing, I thought "where, what"—most of my Indigenous way of knowing, most of my learning about being an Indian—the very beginning of it wasn't words. My dad didn't talk about it: he did it. My aunts and uncles, they didn't talk about it: they did it. And I was there, with them, usually helping. Observing, or helping, or doing whatever fit in for my age at that time with what they were doing. But I didn't get much explanation about it or a lot of words.



My dad made bows and arrows. As a boy, my father fed his brothers and sisters and his mom with what he could catch. He made bows and arrows and used them. And, so, he made bows and arrows for me from the time I was really little. And then I started helping him make them. And in all those times he gave me only one verbal instruction, "Follow the grain." I found out I know how to make bows and arrows. And I make good ones. They work. There's a law to the wood. You have to obey that law of the wood if you're going to make a bow that doesn't break when you try to shoot it, a bow that is going to send that arrow where you're trying to shoot it.

The reason I think of making a bow by following the grain, obeying the law of the wood in relation to reconciling, is that, naturally, wood has knots in it. Following the grain around those knots is the most delicate part of bow making. You cannot just slice through the knot without ruining the potential bow. It is a little like a relationship with a knot in it. Approaching the knot with an attitude of "Just get over it" cuts across the grain and the relationship will break.

There is another kind of knot that is even a better analogy for knots in relationships. If you ever learned to fish with rod and reel, you most likely have dealt with a snarl in your fishing line. One afternoon on Johnny Creek when I was six years old, I was angry and frustrated with a huge knot that got worse the harder I worked on it. My father stretched out his open hand, and I laid the fishing pole, knot, and all into it. Time slowed and the blue sky seemed to get bigger as he touched the knot with gentle patience. I swear there was tenderness in his fingers as he loosened and unknotted the line.

#### *Reconciling is Required*

Imperial conquest of the Americas means that you and I live with viciously tangled knots in relationships between Indigenous peoples and the peoples who have moved here, the peoples that the late James Iron Eagle called "our new friends." Untangling those knots is worth the patience it takes. We cannot balance the books of history. But, together, we can reconcile the future. It is not easy, just required.

The future requires more of us than the past. The past, present, and future are not linear. Even though I cannot locate the citation, I am sure that it was the late Chief Dan George who said, "I carry the past in my heart, I direct my prayers to the future and I try, even though it is very hard, to live in the present." For that reason and because the future starts right now, in every moment of your life, the future is now.

The students who presented at the beginning of this conference taught me that the future is being born right now. We are midwifing the future right

now. There is a future that wants to be born. We can stand around, hands in pockets, or we can pay attention and help this future be worthy of future generations. As Cindy Blackstock says, a future where "children do not have to recover from their childhoods" (personal communication, 2015).

We cannot stand back and do nothing, but we cannot minimize the difficulty, the complexity, of reconciling the future. Meeting this challenge will take and develop qualities of mind, heart, strength, and spirit that humanity has rarely shown. The horror of Indian residential school policy and practice was not simply an unfortunate historical event. It was one of many manifestations of a virulent disease that continues to infect our species. To survive, we must untangle at least some of the knots in our relating to each other, to the biosphere, and to life itself.

Reconciling the future is about improving the quality of our relationships. The highest quality relationship is the place where truth, love, beauty, and strength meet. You are not alone: you come from and live in a web of relating. Do what you know to do, learn from it, and you will get more to do. Read the 94 Calls to Action, looking for one you can help with. Talk to people. Remember to breathe and to heal. Ask for help so you can be of help. There is so much to say but right now the future requires me to take a big breath and get back to work. The rest of this paper is the unedited conclusion of my talk.

#### *The Six Directions of Reconciling*

And I'm going to ask you maybe to help me just a minute. Okay? To say—I'm only 72 years old, I only have one great grandchild. But at the same time, I feel like I've had a really long, good life. And I don't have a lot to lose anymore. So, I want to ask you if you'll stand up for a minute. Okay? Try to keep it to a minute. And I'm going to tell you something. One of the things that pipe does for me, for you, for all of us if we notice: it makes our breath visible. We can see our breath. Ordinarily our breath is invisible. I'm going to say it clarifies our relationship to the universe—that pipe. Because it makes, and I heard, I was told, I don't know from my own knowledge, but I was told that in one of our languages, the name for the pipe is Visible Breath of Our Prayers. Visible Breath of Our Prayers. So, one of the things it did for me this morning, it made my breath visible. And it reminded me that it's not just an ebb and flow to the universe: there's a giving and a taking.

So, in the pipe ceremony, we face the East. I'm going to ask you to face the east, and I'm going to say, send your breath out to the east. Give your gift to the east. And then receive what the east has to give to you. There's a verbal teaching that comes from the east, but there's also the gift of life that comes when you breathe in. And your gift back to life is automatic

when you breathe out. The receiving, we can notice. And the breathing out. So breathe in is *thank you*. Breathing out, here you go, is *giving*.

Now, let's try it to the next direction. So face South, moving sunwise, and bring your voice, your gift, to the south. But you receive from the south the gift of life. Our life is give and take. That's our relationship. Reconciling ourselves with this life on the planet earth right now, right here. And then we go to the West. And we accept the gift of the west. And we give our gift back to the west. And then we go to the North. Same thing. And then because I was taught six directions, okay, I'm going to ask you, look up and beyond that glass there's the blue of the sky. And some people say that's where our ancestors go. The Elder said, "I'm going to be in the blue of the sky." And I send my gift there, my recognition, and my gratitude to those ancestors. And I accept their gift back to me. And the next one is the earth. That is six directions of reconciling.

In the medicine wheel, we talk about body, heart, mind, spirit. Those four rooms in our house, in our home, in our body, in ourselves. In ourselves. Somebody told me, said, "You should visit each of those rooms every day." Spend some time in each of those rooms every day. That's reconciling with ourselves. Taking the time. Be where we are. We're right here, right now. And we're doing—there's a future that our ancestors prayed for. There's a future we prayed for and are praying for. There's a future that wants to happen in response to those prayers. We're who our ancestors prayed for. There's a future that wants to happen. Reconciling what has been with what is, for the sake of all our relations, now and into the future.

I just got a beautiful smiley face note that says, "Five minutes left. Thanks Eber." [laughter]. So I'm going to thank you. And I'm really looking forward to the next presentation. [applause].

*Postscript:* I didn't use my last five minutes for the talk because I was not ready to say the next step. At that point, I couldn't even begin to outline what reconciling the future might look like. I still can't but I can write what I hope are a few clues. As the Elder told the judge, "I won't swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, because I don't know that. I only know the truth as I know it" (personal communication, Vikas Kaladkar, Legal Counsel, Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, circa 1971).

#### *Reconciling the Future*

I suggest that reconciling the future could start with just six breaths, one to each of the six directions; inhaling the gift of life and exhaling your gift to life six times, to reconcile with yourself and all that is, for a least a few minutes of this ever-changing present, with who you are in this place and

time, because we really are living in a giving and receiving relationship with all that is. Breathe and recognize that we live only in relationships with other humans, with other life forms, and with the earth that supports us all. That is important because what follows is difficult, and breathing keeps us alive and occasionally paying attention to the facts of life can underline our humble relationships of giving and receiving.

Reconciling ourselves with life itself improves the quality of our actions: it helps us act together, in relation. Otto Scharmer (2009, p. 5), quoting William O'Brien, former CEO of the Hanover Insurance Company, wrote that, "The success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervenor." That corresponds to the truth as I have experienced it, to the extent that I must add that the quality of our actions depends on many things, including, most importantly, the quality of our relatedness to ourselves, each other, and the field of action.

At the same time as we work on our reconciling with ourselves, it helps to reach out to others with open mind, open heart, open will, and open spirit, as adopted by me from Scharmer's Theory U (2009a, 2009b):

An open mind is a humble mind. "I would like to be of help, maybe I could do something. What do you think?"

An open heart listens deeply. "Am I getting it? Can you tell me more?"

An open will is ready for action. "I'm willing to do the right thing. I will do the right thing as we find out what that is."

An open spirit creates space for and recognizes inspiration; an open spirit knows a good idea when it presents itself.

Reconciliation starts with truth. We need open minds to see what has happened and what is happening. The TRC report is explicitly based on stories of residential school survivors. What remain implicit are the stories of colonialism that produced residential school policies and practices, and that continue to produce discrimination against Aboriginal children. (For only one example of continuing discrimination, see the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, 2016, CHRT 10.)

The major obstacle to reconciliation is that Canada continues its colonization of Aboriginal peoples. An increasing body of Canadian and international literature produced by Aboriginal and Settler scholars is devoted to understanding what is being called Settler colonialism, with an intent to decolonize and find a better relationship between Aboriginals, Settlers, and Migrants to Canada. *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* by a Dene scholar, Glen Coulter (2014), is one place to start understanding the complexities of what has been and is colonialism in Canada.

Some very practical steps toward reconciling the future are the 94 Calls to Action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I strongly encourage you to join with others, to do what you can to assist in getting those calls to action implemented. The current Government of Canada has committed to their implementation, but strong public understanding and support is needed. The Calls for Action are addressed to institutions in which Canadian citizens have some voice. As scholars and educators, we have responsibilities to ourselves, our students, our profession, and our society. Those responsibilities demand that we pay attention and deal with at least the TRC's Calls to Action that are directed to education.

The residential schools violated the sexual, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual integrity of children. Some of these violations were policy. Those violations of children that were not policy were violations that educational policy failed to prevent and, in many if not most cases, allowed to continue. These violations, these perversions of human decency, happened as a matter of policy and/or practice in what were, and still are, called "schools." No wonder we sometimes give in to our all too human impulses to deny, evade, escape, rationalize, and minimize.

As educators and as humans, we must call on the best that is in us and the best methodologies we have, to defeat impulses that would have us close our minds and hearts to what schools were and to what schools now are. Our integrity as humans, along with the integrity of our profession, is on the line. As humans and, particularly, as scholars and educators, we are midwives to the future that is being born right now.

#### *What the Empire Teaches*<sup>1</sup>

It is hard for empires to learn.  
humans learn or die.  
history is written by the victors.  
our history will be written by cockroaches  
or by humans who have learned to live together.

an empires die they leave behind administrative units,  
strange organs of their colonial administration called nation states.  
places like iraq, zimbabwe, yugoslavia, the united states,  
canada, great britain, the sudan.

each nation-state has its own history and dynamic.  
each is presented with its own challenges, its own choices.  
as fragments of empire they struggle to survive, to govern,  
and in many cases to continue as an imperial project.  
the project of empire is conquest.

conquest of the other necessarily starts with conquest of the self.  
empire is a perversion of the self,  
of the drive for security.

#### *Patience*

Knots on a string  
carry a message  
to decipher

this knot of mine is  
pain, fear, resentment  
a snarl of monofilament

that reminds me of my father's  
patience.

and i am six years old  
standing on the bank  
of Johnny Creek, watching  
my father untangle my fishing line

as a white cloud slowly drifts across  
the wide blue sky and dusty green willow  
leaves whisper secrets, softly, in admiration  
of a man, my father, with patience,  
and strength enough to spare.

#### *Notes*

<sup>1</sup> These poems written by the author express the ideas that are foundational to this paper.

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## Discerning Poisons and Medicines of Modernity

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I am from a family with Indigenous Brazilian and German ancestry. I have been to many different countries and lived in different places. I believe this is partly because the Indigenous tradition where my family comes from is nomadic. They see the Earth as a living entity. If they stay in one place, they believe the land gets sick. Therefore, they travel to where their ancestors send them, and this and other important messages are conveyed through dreams. I have been married into a Cree and Blackfoot family, where ceremonies are performed with the Blackfoot in Alberta. My son is married into a Maori *whanau* (family) in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

This inter-weaving of bloodlines gives me a perspective of many different Indigenous communities. I am no expert in any of them and I do not speak for any of them. I also find it difficult to pinpoint only one place where I "come from." In part, this is because I believe that the earth is alive and upset about fences and divisions. It is also because the tradition of being always on the road, crossing many different types of borders, means one has to feel the pathway itself as a place too: a pathway that enables you to see different patterns, different connections, and many similarities, too, and that offers a different kind of contribution to the whole.

It is in this spirit, as a visitor who belongs to the path and in-betweens, that I would like to acknowledge the ancestors and Elders in the room, both human and more than human. I would like to acknowledge Cash Ahenakew, who has walked part of this path with me and inspired my thinking and scholarship. I would like to acknowledge Cash's grandfather, who comes from Ermineskin reserve. And I would like to acknowledge the people who have invited us here: both the students and the organizers, especially Jeannette Sinclair who has been very generous and very honouring. Because we live in institutions that do not normally acknowledge the kind of work we do, having the opportunity to engage in a welcoming