

# **Disruptive Knowledge in Education for Reconciliation: The Effects of Indigenous Course Requirements on Non-Indigenous Students' Attitudes**

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## **Article abstract**

Following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, various institutions have embarked on diverse educational initiatives in the name of creating equitable and respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples. One such initiative is the University of Winnipeg's mandate that all undergraduate students fulfill an Indigenous Course Requirement (ICR). Using the framework of disruptive knowledge, this mixed-methods study investigated the impact of select ICR courses on non-Indigenous students' attitudes. Results revealed increased recognition of discriminations facing Indigenous Peoples, increased support for systemic change, and self-described behavioural changes. At the same time, these results highlight the limitations of such courses within a settler-colonial context.



# Disruptive Knowledge in Education for Reconciliation: The Effects of Indigenous Course Requirements on Non-Indigenous Students' Attitudes

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## Abstract

Following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, various institutions have embarked on diverse educational initiatives in the name of creating equitable and respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples. One such initiative is the University of Winnipeg's mandate that all undergraduate students fulfill an Indigenous Course Requirement (ICR). Using the framework of disruptive knowledge, this mixed-methods study investigated the impact of select ICR courses on non-Indigenous students' attitudes. Results revealed increased recognition of discriminations facing Indigenous Peoples, increased support for systemic change, and self-described behavioural changes. At the same time, these results highlight the limitations of such courses within a settler-colonial context.

*Keywords:* reconciliation, Indigenous Course Requirement, education for reconciliation, disruptive knowledge

## Résumé

À la suite de la Commission de vérité et réconciliation du Canada (CVR), diverses institutions se sont lancées dans des initiatives éducatives variées au nom de la création de relations équitables et respectueuses entre les peuples autochtones et non autochtones. L'une de ces initiatives est le mandat de l'Université de Winnipeg, selon lequel tous les étudiants de premier cycle suivent un cours obligatoire qui répondra à une exigence de cours autochtone (ECA). En utilisant la théorie des connaissances perturbatrices, cette étude à méthodes-mixtes a examiné l'impact de certains cours (ECA) sur les attitudes des étudiants non autochtones. Les résultats ont révélé une reconnaissance amplifiée des discriminations auxquelles les peuples autochtones sont confrontés, un soutien développé aux initiatives d'équité du gouvernement et des changements de comportement et de pensées auto-décrits. En même temps, ces résultats mettent en évidence les limites de tels cours dans un contexte de colonisation.

*Keywords:* reconciliation, Indigenous Course Requirement, education for reconciliation, disruptive knowledge

## Introduction

Following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) Final Report (TRC, 2015a), *reconciliation* has become ubiquitous in Canadian educational discourse. This contentious term is defined in many ways but typically focuses on establishing respectful and equitable relationships among Indigenous Peoples, non-Indigenous people, and the land (Indigenous Circle of Experts, 2018; TRC, 2015a). At all levels of education, stakeholders frequently draw on this language as they reshape curricula (Kairos, 2016). In 2016, the University of Winnipeg undertook one such initiative. Partly in response to incidents of anti-Indigenous racism on campus (MacIntosh, 2016), the University implemented the Indigenous Course Requirement (ICR): Prior to graduation, all undergraduate students must take at least one course about Indigenous histories, cultures, or matters.

The ICR shares a foundational assumption with the TRC's Final Report: Education is central to the work of reconciliation. Of the TRC's 94 Calls to Action—reconciliation-focused requests made to all levels of governments and other sectors—almost one fifth relate to education, spanning everything from the training of doctors and lawyers to the curricula of K–12 classrooms. The authors of the report urge that “education must remedy the gaps in historical knowledge that perpetuate ignorance and racism” (TRC, 2015b, p. 117). Specifically, they outline several educational goals for non-Indigenous students in Canada:

[Non-Aboriginal students] need to know how notions of European superiority and Aboriginal inferiority have tainted mainstream society's ideas about, and attitudes towards, Aboriginal peoples in ways that have been profoundly disrespectful and damaging. [Non-Aboriginal students] need to understand Canada's history as a settler society and how assimilation policies have affected Aboriginal peoples. This knowledge and understanding will lay the groundwork for establishing mutually respectful relationships. (TRC, 2015b, p. 185)

Although the TRC prompted various governments and organizations to voice commitments to reconciliation, some critics say these promises are empty, that reconciliation has never existed, and reject the term (CBC News, 2020; Talaga, 2020). While they may dismiss the term and its rhetoric, some of these critics still embrace the

potential of truth-telling, myth-busting education as a tool for a new relationship. This study interrogates this widely held belief and is responsive to the fact that little research has examined whether and how education can achieve these goals (TRC, 2015b). In the current research, we aimed to understand how select ICR courses at the University of Winnipeg affect non-Indigenous students' attitudes toward reconciliation in Canada. This focus is responsive to the unique demands of non-Indigenous learners outlined above, and is rooted in scholarship on disruptive knowledge, as reviewed below.

### **Characteristics of Education for Reconciliation in Canada**

When it comes to education aimed at addressing intergroup conflict and injustice, many experts agree that a truly responsive pedagogy must be context-specific (Bar-Tal, 2002; Kumashiro, 2000; Morrison, 2011). Canadian educators cannot simply import other countries' reconciliatory efforts but must attend to the unique characteristics of our setting. For instance, unlike some countries that have developed and studied education for reconciliation, Canada does not exist in a post-conflict reality (Coulthard, 2014; de Costa, 2017); it is a settler-colonial state wherein Indigenous Peoples continue to face systemic discrimination (Alfred, 2009; Lowman & Barker, 2015; McGuire & Denis, 2019; Regan, 2010). Many of the damaging ideologies underlying past harms perpetrated against Indigenous Peoples (e.g., Indian Residential Schools) still shape Canadian society today (Gebhard, 2017). In this context, oppression is a structure and not a past event (Wolfe, 1999) and without a "rupture in the ideological conditions" (de Costa, 2009, p. 7), these systems will continue to operate in a manner that asserts Eurocentric dominance over Indigenous Peoples' lands, ways of knowing, and selves. Put differently, the conflict of settler colonialism—one of displacement, epistemological violence, and erasure—is so deeply woven into Canada's fabric that any reconciliation-oriented teaching and learning efforts must begin by unsettling learners' passive acceptance of the violent status quo (Gebhard, 2017; Hiller, 2016, 2017; Regan, 2010; Schick, 2000; St. Denis, 2007).

Current research supports the idea that non-Indigenous people in Canada do not fully realize or acknowledge the oppression of Indigenous Peoples. In a 2016 nationally-representative survey, only a minority of respondents recognized that Indigenous Peoples face ongoing systemic discrimination in education systems (42%), the justice system (38%), or the health care system (26%; Environics Institute for Survey Research,

2016). These attitudes stand in stark contrast with the TRC's (2015a) findings, which outline how systemic racism manifests in the underfunding of education on reserves, disproportionately high rates of incarceration, and inequitable medical treatment.

Non-Indigenous Canadians' failure to acknowledge ongoing injustice is also evident in approaches to education. Much teaching and learning regarding Indigenous–non-Indigenous relations fails to adequately address ongoing injustice, racism, and the presence of settler colonialism (Battiste, 2013; Hiller, 2016, 2017; Regan, 2010; St. Denis, 2007, 2011). In light of these contextual realities, education for reconciliation for non-Indigenous Canadians must include *disruptive knowledge*—the theoretical foundation of our study.

### Disruptive Knowledge

Disruptive knowledge (sometimes referred to as consciousness-raising education) draws attention to ongoing systemic injustice, raises questions of complicity, and pushes learners to an ongoing, embodied response (Czyzweski, 2011; Gebhard, 2017; Hiller, 2017; Regan, 2010). Such education is disruptive in the sense that it radically transforms the perceived relationship between the learner and oppressive forces of settler colonialism. Oppression is understood as a present reality that is both structural and interpersonal, in which the student is complicit in the injustice and responsible for addressing it. Additionally, disruptive knowledge resists learners' desire for finality and complete answers, inviting them into the unending work of examining power and privilege (Kumashiro, 2000). In a Canadian context, such education must disrupt the tendencies to overlook or ignore how matters of race, power, and privilege shape Indigenous–non-Indigenous relations; it must confront non-Indigenous learners with an unfiltered image of present-day settler colonialism in Canada (Czyzweski, 2011; Davis et al., 2017; Ermine, 2007; Gebhard, 2017; Hiller, 2016, 2017; Lowman & Barker, 2015; McGuire & Denis, 2019; Regan, 2010; Schick, 2000; St. Denis, 2011).

Disruptive knowledge was the guiding theoretical framework for this study. We operationalized disruptive knowledge as four attitudinal markers: awareness of contemporary injustice, sense of complicity, sense of responsibility, and support for systemic change. We chose survey and interview questions intended to assess these potential attitudinal outcomes of disruptive knowledge and analyzed the data through this lens. We also

exclusively studied courses that included some discussion of the contemporary oppression of Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

### **Position of Researchers**

The theoretical framework of disruptive knowledge requires us, the authors, to confront our roles, and the role of this research, in the ongoing injustices facing Indigenous Peoples. We are non-Indigenous settlers who are living in Treaty 1 Territory and homeland of the Métis Nation. Given our focus on Western knowledge and the experiences of non-Indigenous participants, we are left with a few difficult questions: Are we reinforcing harmful research practices? Does this research simply capitalize on the ubiquitous yet often empty discourse surrounding reconciliation? As a means of attending to such questions, the general discussion includes critiques of disruptive knowledge and the discourse of reconciliation more broadly. These sections do not overcome the limitations of the work, nor do they lessen its inherent epistemological tensions. Instead, they acknowledge that this type of research, while seeking to contribute to reconciliation, is fraught with problems of its own.

### **Method**

To examine the effects of ICRs on non-Indigenous students' attitudes, we used a two-phase mixed-methods design. We first collected and analyzed quantitative data and then, to gain further insight, we gathered and analyzed qualitative data. Phase 1 consisted of a survey that non-Indigenous students completed at the start and end of the ICR. This survey data provided an overview of trends in students' attitudes. Given the complex and interpersonal nature of reconciliation (TRC, 2015b), it was also important to gather rich context-specific descriptions of their experiences. In Phase 2, we conducted in-depth interviews with a subset of Phase 1 participants.

For both phases, we examined ICR courses that fit the theoretical framework of disruptive knowledge (e.g., a focus on contemporary injustice, discussion of settler colonialism). To determine whether a course met these criteria, we read course descriptions and syllabi, and communicated with course instructors; four courses met the criteria.

## Phase 1: Pre- and Post-ICR Surveys

Ninety-one non-Indigenous undergraduate students completed the survey at the start and end of their ICR. Their mean age was 22 years; half of the participants were born in Canada and most self-identified as women (71%) and White (73%). Other reported ethnicities included Filipino (11%), Black (6%), Arab (3%), Korean (2%), or another ethnicity (5%).

We adapted survey questions from the *Canadian Public Opinion on Aboriginal Peoples* survey (EnviroNics Institute for Survey Research, 2016). In cases where multiple survey questions (i.e., items) represented the same theoretical concept, we calculated the mean of those items to create a multi-item measure; compared to single-item measures, multi-item measures are more reliable (Furr, 2011). All four multi-item measures had acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha for measures with at least three items ranged from .69 – .81; Spearman's rho for two-item measures ranged from .52 – .65). We measured participants' attitudes across four areas representing our operationalization of disruptive knowledge.

***Awareness of contemporary injustice.*** To assess participants' awareness of ongoing, systemic discrimination, we presented them with four items that followed the format, "How are Indigenous Peoples treated by the \_\_\_\_\_ system in Canada compared to other Canadians?" Each item referred to a different system (e.g., "education"). Participants responded by choosing an answer ranging from 1 = *Treated much worse* to 5 = *Treated much better*.

***Sense of benefit from unjust systems.*** Using a scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*, participants indicated their sense of benefit from injustices impacting Indigenous Peoples in Canada with two statements, including "I personally benefit from ongoing discrimination against Indigenous Peoples (preferential treatment, etc.)."

***Sense of responsibility in reconciliation.*** Two items measured participants' feelings of responsibility to address inequities impacting Indigenous Peoples in Canada, such as "I personally have a role in bringing about reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada." Response options ranged from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*.

***Support for systemic change.*** Seven items assessed participants' support for systemic change, including "Increas[ing] government funding for Indigenous education to match other schools." Response options ranged from 1 = *Strongly oppose* to 5 = *Strongly support*.



## Phase 2: Interviews

We selectively recruited eight participants whose demographic characteristics and survey responses approximated the Phase 1 data trends and sample. The interviews were semi-structured and included follow-up questions to foster a conversational exchange (Glesne, 2016). The interview script included roughly 20 questions and prompts regarding experiences within ICR courses.

## Results

### Phase 1: Pre- and Post-ICR Surveys

**Main analyses: Did the ICR impact non-Indigenous students' attitudes?** We first tested for changes in participant attitudes from the beginning to the end of their ICR using dependent *t*-tests. After the ICR, participants reported greater awareness of systemic discrimination impacting Indigenous Peoples in Canada, and stronger agreement that non-Indigenous Canadians benefit from such systems; they also expressed stronger agreement that non-Indigenous Canadians have a personal responsibility to address injustices impacting Indigenous Peoples, as well as more support for government initiatives to address injustice. The *p* values indicate that all these attitudinal shifts were statistically significant, and the *d* values signify that they were of medium size (Cohen, 1988). These outcomes reflect the type of desired cognitive shifts at the heart of disruptive knowledge scholarship in the Canadian context (Czyzweski, 2011; Davis et al., 2017; Gebhard, 2017; Hiller, 2016, 2017; Lowman & Barker, 2015; McGuire & Denis, 2019; Regan, 2010). However, the data (Table 1) also revealed some troubling realities.

**Supplementary analyses of single items.** Although multi-item measures are more reliable than single item measures, it can also be justifiable to examine differences in single-item measures (Furr, 2011). In this section, we examine several theoretically-relevant differences among single-item measures.

Prior work documents the common pattern of non-Indigenous people's desire to see themselves as exceptional (Hiller, 2017) or innocent (Tuck & Yang, 2012) in the face of settler colonialism. We wanted to examine whether participants felt this way after their ICR. We were able to test this with two constructs, sense of benefit from unjust systems

and sense responsibility in reconciliation, because each was represented by one item assessing the construct at the personal level and another item assessing it at the collective level. For each construct, we calculated the end-of-ICR means for the individual- and collective-level items and compared them with dependent *t*-tests (see Table 2 for these results). Consistent with extant research, at the end of the course participants reported a mismatch between their individual reality and that of other Canadians: They felt that other Canadians benefitted from injustice more than they did personally, and that other Canadians had more of a role to play in reconciliation than they did personally.

**Table 1**

*Effects of the ICR on Non-Indigenous Students' Attitudes toward Reconciliation (Multi-Item Measures)*

	Start of ICR		End of ICR		Change in Attitude from Start to End of ICR				
	M	SD	M	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	<i>d<sub>z</sub></i>
Awareness of Contemporary Injustice	4.05	0.54	4.29	0.48	5.59	89	<.001	[0.15, 0.32]	0.60
Sense of Benefit from Unjust Systems	2.66	1.28	3.08	1.34	3.79	76	<.001	[0.20, 0.65]	0.42
Sense of Responsibility in Reconciliation	4.43	0.72	4.61	0.57	2.72	89	.01	[0.05, 0.31]	0.29
Support for Systemic Change	4.41	0.54	4.63	0.48	5.52	89	<.001	[0.14, 0.30]	0.58

*Note.* All measures used a 5-point scale.

Within work of decolonization, advocates argue that land is not one issue among many, but it is *the* issue at the heart of addressing settler colonialism (Alfred, 2009; Tuck & Yang, 2012). However, non-Indigenous people often report relatively low levels of support for matters of land (Environics Institute for Survey Research, 2016). We therefore wanted to examine how, at the end of the ICR, participant support for resolving land matters compared to support for other initiatives. To do so, we calculated the means for each of the seven items assessing support for systemic change. Then, we used *t*-tests to statistically compare whether the means for the two land items differed from the other

five items. As shown in Table 3, in nearly every case, participants were less supportive of the two land-based initiatives than they were of other initiatives.

**Table 2**

*Comparison of Attitudes at the Individual versus Collective Levels (Single Item Measures) at the End of the ICR*

	End of ICR				
	Individual-Level Measure		Collective-Level Measure		Comparison of Individual vs. Collective
	M	SD	M	SD	
Sense of Benefit from Unjust Systems	2.87	1.48	3.35	1.50	$t(82) = -3.31, p < .001, d_z = -0.36, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.77, -0.19]$
Sense of Responsibility in Reconciliation	4.46	0.81	4.77	0.48	$t(89) = -4.44, p < .001, d_z = -0.47, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.45, -0.17]$

*Note.* All measures used a 5-point scale, where 1 = *Strongly disagree* and 5 = *Strongly agree*.

**Table 3**

*Comparison of Support for Addressing Matters of Land versus Other Injustice at the End of the ICR*

End of ICR						
Settling all outstanding land claims, regardless of what this may cost	Provide Indigenous communities with full control over natural resources on traditional territories	Increased funding for on-reserve schools to match off-reserve schools	Government funding to reserves for adequate water and housing	Mandatory curricula regarding Indigenous histories and cultures	Government funding to protect Indigenous languages	Mandatory post-secondary Indigenous Course Requirement
<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
4.36 (0.85)	4.41 (0.92)	4.77 (0.54)*	4.95 (0.43)*	4.71 (0.72)*	4.67 (0.60)*	4.58 (0.84)*

*Note.* Within each row, means with a superscript asterisk significantly differ from the mean for “Settling all outstanding land claims, regardless of what this may cost,” whereas means with a subscript asterisk significantly differ from the mean for “Provide Indigenous communities with full control over natural resources on traditional territories.” All items used a 5-point scale, where 1 = *Strongly oppose* and 5 = *Strongly support*.

**Phase 1 summary.** The Phase 1 survey data represent cognitive shifts that in some ways align with the goals of disruptive knowledge, but in other ways fall short of the goals of reconciliation. These mixed results guided our in-depth exploration of participants' experiences in Phase 2.

## Phase 2: Interviews

To garner insights from the Phase 2 data, we used Maxwell's (2013) categorizing strategy, which included coding along organizational, substantive, and theoretical lines. This process involved analyzing themes within the data and applying our theoretical framework of disruptive knowledge. We also engaged in member checking, wherein we invited participant feedback on initial analyses. The following sections capture participants' experiences with various components of disruptive knowledge.

**Recognition of contemporary injustice.** One of the most striking patterns across participants' responses was a deepened recognition of the personal and systemic injustices facing Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Participants described unsettling and uncomfortable experiences of learning about settler colonialism. While these included descriptions of past harms, most participants also described how their ICR courses "exposed a clear understanding of the oppression and marginalization of [Indigenous Peoples] that is ongoing and continuing" (P8). Within this broader theme of disruptive knowledge, there were several trends related to how participants conceptualized and experienced these notions of injustice.

For all participants, this disruptive knowledge indicted the Canadian government and, in some cases, undermined narratives of national benevolence. Participants linked this indictment to many different wrongdoings (discriminatory policies, failure to consult with Indigenous groups, inadequate funding, etc.), but shared in the recognition that "the [Canadian] government worked to eliminate [Indigenous Peoples] rather than trying to fit them into the society they were trying to build" (P6). In some cases, this awakening to institutional discrimination led to a re-imagining of national narratives. P3 described how the unsettling image of Canada she encountered was at odds with the prevalent image of Canada as an inclusive, multicultural society: "I think...we are saying everyone is allowed in Canada and they can be whoever they want to be, in terms of immigrants or anything like that, but that's not really the case." For another participant (P8), the ICR

forced her to re-evaluate what she once thought of as “the best country in the world”: “... now I don’t even think our country is legitimate. That’s what I’ve learned. That’s hard knowledge.” These experiences are precisely the type of myth-busting revelations that so many scholars call for in the Canadian context (Gebhard, 2017; Hiller, 2017; Regan, 2010; Tupper, 2014).

As part of their re-evaluation of Canadian society, participants discussed their shifting understanding of harmful stereotypes surrounding Indigenous communities (alcoholism, crime, parenting, etc.). Within these descriptions, participants did not challenge these tropes but merely suggested that, in light of discrimination and injustice, these issues weren’t “[Indigenous Peoples’] fault” (P5) and shifted the blame to the Canadian government. Many participants continued to describe Indigenous Peoples with wide-sweeping generalizations, suggesting that Indigenous Peoples simply “couldn’t defend themselves” (P1) against the forces of colonialism. Such a “singularizing image of [Indigenous] victimhood” (Madden, 2019, “Restorying and Resurgence” section, para. 5) is deeply problematic, as it fails to recognize Indigenous agency, resilience, or resurgence.

For almost all participants, first-hand accounts from Indigenous Peoples (Elders, Indian Residential School Survivors, guest speakers, classmates, and instructors) were essential to understanding ongoing injustice. Instead of taking the form of statistics or dispassionate news reports, these issues took on a relational and relatable form. Participants were no longer simply learning *about* Indigenous Peoples, they were undertaking the important work of listening *to* and learning *from* their Indigenous neighbours (Davis et al., 2017; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019).

***Sense of complicity in ongoing injustice.*** Within the framework of disruptive knowledge, it is not enough for students to simply acknowledge systemic injustice; learners must also confront their place within these unjust social orders (Davis et al., 2017; Hiller, 2017; Kumashiro, 2000; Regan, 2010). Whereas participants agreed on the presence of ongoing injustice, they diverged in their descriptions of two aspects of complicity: their proximity to discrimination and sense of guilt.

**Proximity to discrimination.** Participants described their complicity in discrimination against Indigenous Peoples using varying levels of social distance. Most frequently, participants described discrimination in ways that did not directly implicate themselves; it was something done by people in general or by the government. For a few participants, though, these descriptions of distant and vague sources of discrimination

were accompanied by more concrete and personal ones. They shared how their family members hold discriminatory views and a few mentioned their own biases. However, these personal biases were often framed as a past reality. These self-reflexive participants shared the sentiments of P2, who described how their ICR “helped me remove the bias I might have initially had when encountering or communicating with Indigenous People.” Mirroring Phase 1 findings, participants were quick to distance themselves from the discrimination they now recognized in society at large.

**Sense of guilt.** Of all the interview topics, participant responses were most divided around experiences of guilt, such as whether they experienced guilt and felt ICRs elicit guilt. This diversity was likely, in part, reflective of the diversity of the participant pool. Whereas some participants cited personal identities (e.g., White, Christian) as a cause for guilt, others cited personal identities as a reason to not feel guilty: “I myself am a visible minority so I don’t think I am benefiting or participating in anything” (P2). This highlights one of the challenges of studying the broad category of non-Indigenous people—a term that encompasses far more than White Canadians, including visible minority groups with varying lived experiences of oppression as victims, benefactors, and/or perpetrators (Vowel, 2016). Though much has been written about White and Settler relationships to such education (Davis et al., 2017; Gebhard, 2017; Hiller, 2017; Regan, 2010; Schick, 2000), further research is needed to delve deeper into the complex relationships between various visible minority identities and such education.

Even among the White participants ( $n = 6$ ), there were divisions around the notion of guilt. In particular, participants offered mixed descriptions on the place and the role of such an emotion in this type of education. Some participants offered reflections similar to those of P4, who stated that they “didn’t want to sit there as a White [person] getting blamed for things.” Similarly, some participants praised their Indigenous instructors for presenting course content in a way that didn’t lay blame on non-Indigenous students, whereas P8 suggested the opposite: “[White Canadians] should own [this history] and have at least a sense of guilt.” Overall, White participants were not prone to expressing guilt, keeping with the aforementioned tendency of describing bias or discrimination as a past reality: “I don’t think I felt guilty per se because...I changed my mindset [after taking this ICR]. I don’t feel guilty because I realized that I really am not going to...put those stereotypes on [Indigenous people]” (P5).

***Sense of personal responsibility.*** Another tenet of disruptive knowledge is that the recognition of ongoing injustice and subsequent self-reflection can lead to embodied change (Freire, 1972; Kumashiro, 2000; Regan, 2010). When exploring this idea, participants offered many ideas for how they could/would engage in the work of reconciliation, including voting, incorporating Indigenous perspectives in their workplaces, and supporting Indigenous organizations. However, almost all focused on their responsibility to educate others on these topics. More importantly, half of the participants described how they had already embodied this newfound belief. Despite the acknowledged discomfort and social risks, the ICR empowered them to challenge discriminatory and ignorant discourses in their social circles.

There's lots of times [in the past] where I could argue a point or share information [on Indigenous issues]...and I just don't, because it's like I'm in a room full of people who just won't hear it or won't understand it.... But now, I'm like, "No. I'm going to argue that point." I'm going to say, "Hey, but did you know this?" I feel like that's changed a lot since I have taken the course. (P4)

Numerous participants described similar behaviour, recognizing that it was more important to address ignorance and confront stereotypes than to maintain social niceties. These data suggest that students' ICR courses gave them "the confidence to be uncomfortable in egregious times" (Sinclair, 2018).

***Support for systemic change.*** As a response to systemic injustice, disruptive knowledge extends beyond this personal sense of responsibility and also pushes for systemic change (Czyzweski, 2011). Reinforcing our findings from Phase 1, all participants in Phase 2 described how the ICR increased their support for various forms of systemic change, including funding for Indigenous language training and providing clean drinking water to all First Nations. In doing so, they clearly articulated a shared sense that the government could and should be doing more to support the well-being of Indigenous communities. In particular, the data revealed shifting attitudes toward mandatory learning on Indigenous matters, histories, and cultures. Prior to their ICR, most participants had concerns about the requirement, viewing it as a threat to their GPA and "a waste of time" (P1), an annoyance (P6), or unnecessary (P3, P4, P5, P7); such resistance to and dismissal of ICRs reflects structural racism (Efimoff, 2021). But students were much more sup-

portive of ICRs after having taken a course. Some participants suggested the ICR helps to address injustice by changing perceptions and fostering empathy. P3 noted that “racism, assimilation, discrimination” are so embedded in “our Canadian history” and that initiatives like the ICR can address such systemic injustice. Other participants described the value of these courses in broader terms, discussing ideas of openness, respect, and reconciliation. This support for required learning on Indigenous issues is particularly noteworthy in light of patterns of opposition or resistance among non-Indigenous students in previous research (Schick, 2000).

***Beyond disruptive knowledge.*** Disruptive knowledge was the main theoretical framework for this study but, upon examining participants’ responses, it became clear that this framework was not all-encompassing. Some participants’ descriptions extended beyond our focus on oppression and discrimination. They addressed the broader spectrum of education for reconciliation, including the value of Indigenous cultures and knowledge systems. These participants shared how these “beautiful and inclusive” (P8) Indigenous teachings had already benefitted their lives, describing their efforts to integrate the Seven Sacred Teachings in their workplace (P4) and a newfound respect for the land and the natural world (P2). These findings provide important reminders that these courses offer more than just disruptive knowledge that illuminates oppression and injustice; these courses can also capture Indigenous knowledges, resilience, and resurgence (Madden, 2019).

## Discussion

Our quantitative and qualitative data converged around a few key trends. After taking their ICRs, non-Indigenous participants reported an increased recognition of ongoing injustice impacting Indigenous Peoples, sense of responsibility in the work of reconciliation, and support for systemic change. At the same time, participants’ responses suggested a rejection of individual complicity and limited desire for ongoing self-critical reflection. These findings offer insights for both theory and practice.

### Implications for Theory

Both in Canada and internationally, Truth and Reconciliation Commissioners, educators, policy makers, and academics believe education can play a positive role in engendering



reconciliation, yet there is little research to support such claims (Cole, 2007; Hart, 2011). Our study addresses these gaps by providing support for the positive potential of education for reconciliation while highlighting its possible pitfalls. This study also offers insights into the place of disruptive knowledge within the Canadian context.

This study began with a recognition that disruptive knowledge—which confronts non-Indigenous learners with the ongoing nature of settler colonialism and systemic injustice, promotes critical self-reflection, and demands embodied responses—is widely supported in this area of scholarship (Anderson, 2017; Czyzweski, 2011; Davis et al., 2017; Gebhard, 2017; Hiller, 2016, 2017; Lowman & Barker, 2015; McGuire & Denis, 2019; Regan, 2010; Tupper, 2014). Ermine (2007) described how an honest look at Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations “should act as a mirror to [non-Indigenous people in] Canada” (p. 200), teaching them about “the character and honour of a nation to have created such conditions of inequity...the mindset of a human community of people refusing to honour the rights of other human communities” (p. 200). This study affirms how glimpsing such a vision of Canada—where illusions of governmental benevolence are stripped bare and questions of complicity are pointedly raised—can be unsettling for non-Indigenous people and can nudge them toward an embodied response. Upon finishing their ICR, many participants seemed to feel that they now “[knew] too much” (Hiller, 2017, p. 424) to be complacent, which propelled them into difficult conversations with family and friends where they sought to challenge stereotypes and address ignorance.

Our data also reflect important critiques of this type of education: Disruptive knowledge can produce a shallow experience of apparent transformation, which detracts from serious, ongoing engagement with the reality of settler colonialism (Czyzewski, 2011; Regan, 2010; Tuck & Yang, 2012). As Gaudry (2016, “Courses Taught by Experts” section, para. 1) notes, ICR students may come to “know enough to sound like they understand what they are talking about, but don’t yet know the limits of their knowledge.” Our participants were eager to educate others while articulating understandings of Indigenous Peoples that were incorrect and insensitive. In their desire to hastily assume the role of “instant expert” (Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019, p. 8), they risked further reinforcement of the discriminatory systems and attitudes they aimed to dismantle. This shallow transformation also extends into the emotional domain, where fleeting experiences of complicity allow non-Indigenous students to “feel good about feeling bad” (Regan, 2010, p. 47). Some participants described the difficult work of addressing ongoing injustice but

they did so in a manner that transformed notions of bias/discrimination into an external or past reality. It was almost as if the course had helped them overcome their place in settler colonialism. This tendency—to “move to innocence” (Tuck & Yang, 2012), to see one’s self as exceptional in an otherwise racist society (Hiller, 2017)—provides non-Indigenous learners with a sense of atonement or accomplishment and hides the need for ongoing education, self-reflection, and engagement in the work of decolonization.

These findings complement an important critique of reconciliation more broadly. The term signals a desire for a better relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, but does not always involve a commitment to enact the necessary, substantive structural changes (Alfred, 2009). In both phases of our study, although participants expressed support for systemic change, this support did not extend equally to issues of land. In Phase 1, participant support for reconciliation initiatives was relatively low for land, and in Phase 2, only a few participants discussed initiatives involving land claims or natural resources. In a context where issues of land-based justice are central to disrupting settler colonialism (Hiller, 2017; Tuck & Yang, 2012), we must be cautious of “half-hearted measures” (Alfred, 2009, p. 181) of supposed benevolence that obscure the needs and desires of Indigenous Peoples. Shifts in attitude and behaviour, like those outlined in this study, are important, but they cannot be mistaken for an endpoint in and of themselves; education is just one part of a much larger and more complicated process of reconciliation that must foreground relationships with the land.

## **Implications for Practice**

Our findings also offer insights regarding the implementation of education for reconciliation. The data suggest that, in the Canadian context of the University of Winnipeg, ICRs rooted in disruptive knowledge can be a preliminary step in engaging non-Indigenous people in reconciliation. These findings support earlier work outlining the generally positive outcomes of ICRs at the University of Winnipeg (Lepp Friesen, 2018). However, this type of learning can actually obscure the work of reconciliation if students don’t recognize such learning as preliminary. Likely, a single course is not capable of overcoming the “logic of settler colonialism” (Maddison & Stastny, 2016, p. 245) that pervades our society; students must recognize this as they embrace the need for unending, self-critical education. Disruptive knowledge, like the work of reconciliation, does not have a clearly

defined end point; it does not seek “final knowledge (and satisfaction), but disruption, dissatisfaction, and the desire for more change” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 34). Administrators and educators must continue to frame these courses in ways that remind students of the ongoing nature of education for reconciliation. Perhaps the value of these ICRs should not be judged on students’ attitudes at the end of the class—as we have done here—but on whether such courses propel them to seek further learning, such as taking additional courses on Indigenous matters (Gaudry, 2016).

When designing ICRs, educators and institutions must also ensure the courses foreground lived Indigenous experiences as well as perspectives on land. Participants in this study expressed the transformational impact of Indigenous instructors and guest speakers. Moreover, centring Indigenous voices in education is also consistent with calls for reconciliation as well as Indigenization and decolonization (Battiste, 2013; Efimoff, 2021; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Therefore, it is essential that in ICRs, non-Indigenous students do not merely learn about but also learn from their Indigenous neighbours, such as Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Indian Residential School Survivors, Land Defenders, and others who occupy spaces within and beyond academia. Importantly, such engagement must be done in a culturally-appropriate manner. While our study did not examine the extent to which these policies were implemented at the University of Winnipeg, current ICR policies (University of Winnipeg, n.d.) might promote this type of learning: they acknowledge the value of traditional knowledge, outline culturally appropriate and place-oriented protocols for working with Elders, and provide funding for honoraria.

## Limitations and Directions for Future Research

One limitation of this work is that we did not examine Indigenous students’ experiences. As noted earlier, this was an intentional decision based on both the University of Winnipeg’s and TRC’s unique educational prescriptions for non-Indigenous learners. Our data nevertheless highlight the need to understand the experiences of Indigenous students. Given the problematic ideas and beliefs described in our data, it is plausible that Indigenous students encountered racism and ignorance during the ICR (see also Efimoff, 2021; Harp, 2019). Due to the myriad negative consequences of exposure to even seemingly “small” incidences of racism (Mouzon et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2003), it is essential to examine the potential negative effects of these courses on Indigenous students. Relatedly, nu-

merous non-Indigenous participants noted how their Indigenous classmates' personal accounts transformed their own attitudes, which raises an important tension. On one hand, such first-hand accounts may help to Indigenize academia (Smith & Summerville, 2017). On the other hand, Indigenous students may find themselves burdened with the role of presumed expert (Efimoff, 2021; Efimoff & Starzyk, 2020; Lepp Friesen, 2018), forcing them to relive trauma and assume unwanted responsibilities in the classroom. That said, because of settler colonialism's epistemological damage, not all Indigenous students will come to ICRs with a deep understanding of past and present harms, examples of resurgence and so on. ICRs may therefore also transform Indigenous students' thoughts and actions, such as knowledge, identity, cultural connection, and relationality with Indigenous peers. We hope that future research can examine these issues and develop culturally appropriate best practices to support Indigenous students in ICRs.

This study's sample also limits the generalizability of our findings. Participants began the study with attitudes that, on average, seemed more supportive than those reported in nationally representative polling (Environics Institute for Survey Research, 2016; Reconciliation Canada, 2017). However, our goal was never to study a nationally representative sample; we wanted to examine the unique experiences of post-secondary students within this particular educational program. Nevertheless, we recognize that there may have been some self-selection bias within our data (e.g., unsupportive students avoiding courses focused on disruptive knowledge, supportive students selecting to complete the study). Despite this potential limitation, our repeated measures design clearly documented attitudinal change, even among this supportive subsection of the general population. To build on our findings, we hope other researchers will continue to examine various forms of education for reconciliation within and beyond the university.

We also recognize the limitations of our traditional Western research practices. Given the damages caused by positivism in our settler-colonial society, some scholars advocate for a dialectic approach of Eurocentric and Indigenous epistemologies (Battiste, 2013; TRC, 2015a) within the work of reconciliation. These authors offer a vision of academia in which various forms of knowledge address matters of reconciliation. As two Settler scholars, we acknowledge that our research does not fully align with this vision. As steps toward it, we consciously embraced non-positivist approaches, including a post-positivist framework, mixed methods, and member checking. We hope this work will complement existing and future ICR research grounded in Indigenous approaches.

## Conclusion

When confronted with the disruptive knowledge of settler colonialism in historic and contemporary Canada, non-Indigenous participants deepened their awareness of ongoing injustice and desire to address this oppression on personal and systemic levels. This process questioned empty narratives of Canadian benevolence while simultaneously challenging unjust discourses and systems. These findings affirm the potential of disruptive knowledge while adding unique outcome-based data into the largely theory-driven discussions of education for reconciliation. Yet somewhat ironically, these positive findings also represent the greatest danger in our data. Given the fraught desire of non-Indigenous people to assume positions of innocence and/or exceptionality in the face of settler colonialism, these experiences of attitudinal change may satisfy their self-serving desire for redemption and, in doing so, obscure the need for ongoing, self-critical reflection.

Herein lays the tension at the heart of this study: Disruptive knowledge offers one option to unsettle non-Indigenous learners' consciousness, but the pervasive and entrenched nature of settler colonialism can recast any sense of progress toward self-serving and system-serving ends. For education to better assist the work of reconciliation, disruptive knowledge must be framed within the larger recursive, complex, and unending work of establishing a mutually beneficial relationship between Indigenous Peoples, non-Indigenous people, and the land.

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