

# **A Review of Research and Reconciliation: Unsettling Ways of Knowing through Indigenous Relationships by Shawn Wilson, Andrea V. Breen, Lindsay DuPré (Eds).**

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*Research and Reconciliation: Unsettling Ways of Knowing through Indigenous Relationships* by Shawn Wilson, Andrea V. Breen, Lindsay DuPré (Eds). Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars, 2020.

I read this book while involved in the University of Saskatchewan's 4<sup>th</sup> Annual *māmowi āsohtetan* (let's cross this together) Truth and Reconciliation Forum in the Spring of 2021. A resounding message from the keynote speakers was that meaningful reconciliation cannot be attained without addressing barriers to respectful relationships: inequities, racism, oppression, discrimination, elitism, and heteropatriarchy. Next, I heard that hope lies within Indigenous knowledges, which have teachings that inspire respectful relationships (e.g., all my relations, seven generations, medicine wheel teachings). These same messages emerged as I read and re-read *Research & Reconciliation: Unsettling Ways of Knowing through Indigenous Relationships* (Wilson et al. 2019).

This collection of 17 essays, which are edited by Shawn Wilson (Opaskwayak Cree), Andrea Breen (Western and Eastern European heritage), Lindsay DuPré (Métis), are directed towards Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, professors, administrators, and practitioners from all disciplines. As the subtitle suggests, the contributing authors pronounce critical unsettling positions to reconciliation and boldly share their insights and experiences in creative ways. In the introduction, Breen, Wilson, and DuPré comment, in the context of research, “We have understood [reconciliation] to mean many different things to people” and “We have also understood this word to be associated with exploitation and ongoing colonialism” (p. xi). The authors express that reconciliation is a word that needs unpacking because of its seemingly elusive nature and the tensions that have come to embody the concept. The engaging and impactful chapters provide an array of perceptions and experiences related to reconciliation and research through diverse forms of sharing knowledge: conversations with colleagues and trickster, photos, prose, satire, news clips, a love letter to youth, a 12-step program to reconciliation through instagram, poetry, song, drawings, and a community graffiti mural. The relationship between reconciliation and Eurocentric and/or Indigenous forms of research is demonstrated in thought-provoking ways, and the complexity of this relationship is made apparent by the many contributors in the book. I appreciated that reconciliation was examined from global perspectives — beyond Canada and beyond the Truth and Reconciliation 94 Calls to Action — and that the concept of reconciliation was made richer by the diverse Indigenous voices in the collection (e.g., Akearok & Sallaffie, pp. 229-239; Anderson & Mashake, pp. 241-253). I also appreciated the last section of the book, “Learning to Walk”, because it provided examples of how research can support reconciliation, which includes addressing injustices, if the processes are respectful, genuinely participatory, and truly uplifting of Indigenous knowledges.

Significant themes emerged as I read the chapters, such as the range of intense emotions that accompany reconciliatory dialogue and actions and how racism, power, and privilege can

be disguised as reconciliation. For example, Whitlow and Oliver note that cultural bridging for reconciliation is difficult and can be very frustrating for Indigenous people that are expected to effectively translate relevant Indigenous cultural teachings in ways that non-Indigenous people can understand (p. 206). Much is lost in translation during this process. Throughout the book, questions are also raised about invisibility and the erasure of Indigenous voices, and the posturing of people with disparate positions and intentions. Breen asks settlers to reflect on their power and privilege, and the personal and professional changes they are making (if any) to support meaningful engagement with Indigenous peoples (pp. 49-58). She encourages settlers to ask: “in what ways do I benefit, historically and in the present, from White supremacy, colonialism? and what people are calling reconciliation?” (p. 55). Without respectful inclusion, engagement, and consultation in research processes, Indigenous peoples are left to feel that they are “hidden in plain sight” (Montgomery Ramirez, p. 66) and once again left with symbolic and tokenistic gestures. One group makes a strong call for more training in active listening and the reframing of research as competitive to collaborative and co-operative (King, Brass, & Lewis, p. 135) for university ethics boards, funding agencies, and those who are engaged in research that is reconciliatory in design.

Indigenist approaches to research are beautifully described and illustrated throughout the book. Indigenist research approaches are “based on an understanding that reality is relationships” (Wilson & Hughes, p. 8), and the methodologies are emergent (p. 9), experiential, and there is a responsibility to share the discoveries. Various authors throughout the book indicate that Indigenous methodologies require one to remember, be action-focused, engage in a cultural journey, resonate, care, walk with integrity, reciprocate, attend, be present, connect to spirit. This orientation to research locates land as teacher (*aki gakinoomaagewin*) and as a methodology (Ray, Cormier, Desmoulins, p. 75). The learning is multi-sensory, physical and spiritual. Whitlow and Oliver state, “Contrary to what Canada might think, we are not creating new Indigenous frameworks, we are simply introducing you to them. They might be new to the academy, but they have been in operation on our lands for tens of thousands of years. They are ancient” (p. 207). Indigenist researchers understand and respect these authentic and highly credible knowledges (Wilson & Hughes, p. 15).

Reconciliation makes many relational appearances in the book. It is embodied in a fish fry with colleagues, described as “*sakihewaywin* – love in action” (Wilson & Huges, p. 17), and framed by philosophies such as “*indinawemaagaanidog* – all my relations” (Anishinaabe) (Ray, Cormier, & Desmoulins, p. 81), and *tentsitewaten-ronhste* – we will become friends again (Mohawk) (Whitlow & Oliver, p. 206). The reader learns that reconciliation can also be enacted through Indigenous frameworks and models such as the the *Piliriqatigiinni* model, “working for a common cause or we’re all working toward a common good” (Inuktituk)(Akearok & Sallaffie, p. 232). Importantly, as many of the authors communicate, Indigenous approaches to research and reconciliation emphasize Indigenous self-determination and transformation. The reader is also provided with examples of reconciliatory research between Indigenous and settler people that begins with proper protocols and an invitation into territory, as is done in the edge

of the woods ceremony (Aluli-Meyer, Armstrong, Belanger, Carter, Derickson, Fogal, Kelly, Kenny, Magnat, Naytowhow, Ulehla, & Wuttunee, p. 159). From Indigenous perspectives, research in all forms should help us grow as human beings.

Story is recurrently identified as an ontology, epistemology, methodology, as a method, a means to reconciliation, and a force. Over the course of the reading, story is also described as having the power to change lives and societies, to initiate the reclamation of sovereignty, to liberate, carry, and release truth, to be testimony, and to heal and restore. As I read the collection I reflected on my stories, and I was reminded that these stories directly influenced who I have become. Wilson and Hughes recommend, “In the spirit of moving toward balance, it is necessary to reclaim a privileged space for these Stories and appreciate the sensitive political context which this communication takes space” (p. 12). We learn that language is limiting for story and much can be lost in translation. Penak (p. 141) explained the challenges related to adapting oral and performative versions of story into the written word. She reminds readers about the importance of having an active relationship with, and be stewards of, story and storytelling.

The contradictions and messiness of reconciliation also surface in the book (Whitlow & Oliver, p. 204). Penak cautions that reconciliation efforts can also delay, steer-away and make disappear “conversations of Indigenous self-determination” (p. 149) and the necessary systemic restructuring work that supports reconciliation that needs to happen. Breen comments that there are spaces sacred and exclusive to Indigenous peoples, so non-Indigenous people who frame their work as reconciliatory should respect and recognize that there are “spaces that are not for [settlers]. [Settlers] should not expect to have access to every aspect of knowledge, every tool, and every ceremony” (p. 154). Settlers are also asked to stand alongside Indigenous peoples to advance justice and challenge systemic barriers such as grant applications that do not acknowledge other ways of leading, organizing, and conducting research (DuPré, p. 3; Whitlow & Oliver, p. 199). Helferty encourages settlers to research their own experiences (p. 190) to further reconciliation. non-Indigenous researchers are also encouraged to ask hard (perhaps painful) questions that demand introspection and answers before projects with Indigenous communities begin: Who benefits from reconciliation? (Breen, p. 55); “[O]n whose terms is reconciliation (research) being based? Whose processes and values? Who has the power to decide the priorities of this work/relationship and whose language is being used?” (Wilson, p. 88); Do we concile or reconcile, and with whom? (Minton & Lile, p. 219); Who is doing the giving? Who is doing the work — Indigenous or non-Indigenous people? (King, et al., pp. 118-137; Whitlow & Oliver, p. 206).

As the subtitle suggests, this research and reconciliation book does unsettle traditional Eurocentric/Western ways of knowing and of “doing” research by bringing forth, in resounding ways, Indigenous perspectives on relationships. By reviewing these essays, I see how the book demonstrates a trans-systemic approach, showing respect for diverse perspectives and letting co-creation guide the engagement processes of research so reconciliation can be experienced in deeper forms. In all of this, the “how” (how we do things) is key to beginning and sustaining relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, which will contribute to research

that is trustworthy and mutually beneficial. The book is refreshing because creativity, honesty, and truth appear on every page. Through it, I have been inspired, captivated, rejuvenated, and provoked into anticipation of the future of research. How will research embody and initiate reconciliation between peoples and creation? Can it? I am hopeful. ni-gichi naennimak ni-tiniwaymahgunuk/ in honour of all my relatives.

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Treaty 6 territory & the homeland of the Métis