

# **TEACHING HISTORY FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION: THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF NARRATIVITY, TEMPORALITY, AND IDENTITY**

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Résumé de l'article

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# TEACHING HISTORY FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION: THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF NARRATIVITY, TEMPORALITY, AND IDENTITY

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper argues that history educators and teachers are uniquely implicated in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action through their responsibility to teach Indigenous and Canadian history, including the injustices of settler colonialism. After examining the politics of Canada's ongoing truth and reconciliation process, this paper articulates three conceptual challenges for history education in pursuit of reconciliation: narrativity, temporality, and identity. This paper concludes by suggesting possible pedagogical opportunities for each of these challenges, taking into consideration a historical thinking approach to teaching and learning now embedded in most provincial and territorial curricula.

**ENSEIGNER L'HISTOIRE POUR LA VÉRITÉ ET LA RÉCONCILIATION: DÉFIS ET OPPORTUNITÉS DE LA NARRATIVITÉ, LA TEMPORALITÉ ET L'IDENTITÉ**

**RÉSUMÉ.** Cet article soutient que les professeurs et enseignants en histoire jouent un rôle unique dans la mise en œuvre des appels à l'action formulés dans le cadre de la Commission de vérité et réconciliation du Canada en enseignant l'histoire autochtone et canadienne ainsi que les injustices perpétrées par le colonialisme. Suite à l'analyse des politiques canadiennes en termes de processus de vérité et réconciliation, nous abordons dans cet article trois défis conceptuels de l'enseignement de l'histoire dans la recherche de la réconciliation : la narrativité, la temporalité et l'identité. Nous terminons l'article en présentant des pistes pédagogiques potentielles pour chacun de ces défis, prenant en considération une approche de pensée historique en lien avec l'enseignement et l'apprentissage maintenant intégrée dans la plupart des programmes provinciaux et territoriaux.

Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has brought the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians to the forefront of public discourse, yet reconciliation remains a contested concept and an unclear process. Recent controversies suggest that many Canadians misunderstand or fail to acknowledge the history and lasting structures of settler colonialism in Canada. Senator Lynn Beyak's comments, which referred to

Indian Residential Schools as “well intentioned,” and the TRC *Final Report* (Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC], 2015a) as a disappointment because it “didn’t focus on the good” (Tasker, 2017, para. 12), are just one example of the failure of many Canadians to acknowledge and accept what the TRC (2015a) has called a “conscious policy of cultural genocide” (p. 55). Dangerous misconceptions, such as the idea that residential schools weren’t that bad, or that Canada only engaged in benevolent forms of colonialism, continue to be prevalent. At the same time, reconciliation has been adopted as a state supported process with public institutions, including schools, asked to do the work of reframing or repairing the damaged relationship between Indigenous peoples and settler Canadians.

Within this context, educators have been positioned to play a significant role in helping students and the public come to terms with Canada’s colonial past and how it shapes our present. As the Chair of the TRC, Justice Murray Sinclair, has stated, “education is what got us into this mess...but education is the key to reconciliation” (as cited in Walters, 2015). The high expectations of this proposition present several challenges for teachers and teacher educators. As Simon (2013) has argued, the ability of schools to reimagine the nation’s identity and historical narrative “may be more a matter of symbolic optics than social transformation” (p. 135). Regardless, the educational policy and curricular changes brought about by the work of the TRC have created a space for new pedagogical possibilities. However, before reforms are implemented, I argue that educators must be able to answer questions such as: What is reconciliation? How am I implicated in the legacy of settler colonialism in Canada? And, what role (if any) might educators have in movements of Indigenous resurgence?

History educators and teachers have a crucial and unique role to play in answering these questions and building a new understanding of Canada’s history. Yet, teaching Canada’s contentious past is no easy task and Canadian history education becomes more complex as state-mandated reconciliation efforts become an embedded principle of provincial and territorial curriculum. The recommendations of the TRC, as outlined by their 94 Calls to Action, have significant implications for K-12 public education. The 63<sup>rd</sup> Call to Action from the TRC (2015b) challenges the Council of Ministers of Education to “maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues” (p. 7) which includes:

- i. Developing and implementing K-12 curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.
- ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.
- iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.
- iv. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above. (TRC, 2015b, p. 7)

In responding to this Call to Action, history and social studies teachers must engage with both the challenges of how to effectively teach about Indian Residential Schools and Indigenous history, but also the ability to think critically about their position in relation to ongoing injustices of colonialism in Canada.

In this position paper, I explore the implications of the TRC's findings and the 94 Calls to Action for history and social studies education, with an aim of providing teachers and history educators with a clearer conception of the challenges and possibilities facing them. Further, I also challenge researchers in Canadian history education to engage with relevant concepts and ideas emerging from settler colonial studies and critical Indigenous studies, which have been under addressed in the field. In addressing an audience of teachers, researchers, and teacher educators, I bring to bear my experiences as a history teacher, history education researcher, and my identity as a white, settler-Canadian. I begin from the starting point that all Canadians are implicated in settler colonialism and that non-Indigenous Canadians must take this implication seriously by considering what responsibilities they share in a reconciliation process.

To better understand the complexities facing history teachers in the wake of the TRC findings, I articulate three major tensions or challenges revolving around conceptions of narrativity, temporality, and identity, concepts that I introduce here and explain in more depth further on. First, historical narratives found in schools tend to promote a nation building story that is often at odds with re-framing the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. Second, current discourse around settler colonialism in Canada tends to temporally place injustice solely in the distant past; helping students and teachers identify and recognize continuities of colonialism in our present structures cannot be ignored. Third, history education positioned in pursuit of reconciliation requires more than just teaching and learning about unjust actions, events and structures; it must compel teachers and students to reflect on their identities and consider what it would mean to reframe their ethical orientation to past, present and future, or develop what Simon (2005) has called "a renewed historical consciousness" (p. 94). Finally, teaching history for reconciliation requires all non-Indigenous teachers, such as myself, to engage seriously with how they might benefit from settler colonialism and how this relates to whom, how, and what they teach.

## CONTEXTUALIZING RECONCILIATION

The concept of reconciliation in Canada is contentious and there is no agreed upon framework or definition. Critical Indigenous scholarship has made clear that reconciliation is not a neutral concept, nor is it accepted as a path to Indigenous sovereignty or resurgence (Alfred, 2009; Coulthard, 2014; Turner, 2013;). Glen Coulthard (2014) has argued that in the Canadian context, the term reconciliation has been invoked in three distinct ways: first, as a process

of Indigenous self-healing after experiencing symbolic or structural violence; second, as a process restoring damaged relationships between individuals and groups; and third, as a process of bringing divergent entities into accord or harmony. It is this third invocation that Turner (2013) has argued is of particular importance when thinking about the incompatibility of Indigenous sovereignty and the nation-state's desire for reconciliation. Turner has suggested the true meaning of reconciliation for the Canadian state is to render Indigenous claims to self-determination consistent with the supremacy of nation state sovereignty. In other words, reconciliation emphasizes Indigenous self-healing while controlling Indigenous nationhood, knowledge and systems of law in a "unilateral assertion of Canadian sovereignty" (Turner, 2013, p. 108). Both Coulthard and Turner agree that reconciliation, in its current form, is a deeply problematic term and process. Understanding the inherent problems of reconciliation is essential for teachers grappling with how to teach for, and about, reconciliation, as it becomes an embedded aspect of Canadian public education. I now turn my attention to the historical and political context of reconciliation in Canada, to explore the framework's origins, and how Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples are discussing, deliberating, and acting on the findings of the TRC.

### *Transitional justice and reconciliation*

Internationally, reconciliation processes have been understood using the discourse of "transitional justice," a concept that has been applied to post-conflict states undergoing state wide reforms in the wake of historical injustices such as genocide, mass violence, and human rights violations. The term historical injustice is broadly understood as representing harmful or violent historical acts, events, or structures that have ongoing legacies for people, groups, or communities. As Barkan (2000) has argued, "historical injustices are continuous injustices and should not be treated as bygones" (p. 344). Transitional justice theory is commonly used when examining efforts to redress historical injustices in post conflict societies, such as in South Africa at the end of Apartheid. Engaging with research in this field (Barkan, 2000; Neuman & Thompson, 2015) helps us consider how Canada's truth and reconciliation process compares to other nations' attempts at transitional justice.

Recent government policies and discourse have moved Canada towards reimagining itself as a nation undergoing transitional justice. Government actions such as official apologies, common experience payments, and commemorative efforts embolden this idea (Henderson & Wakeham, 2013; Matsunaga, 2016; Nagy, 2013). In a *Globe and Mail* editorial, Minister of Justice Wilson-Raybould was quoted as saying that Canada's reconciliation process could learn from South Africa as it offers "many important insights" and "many parallels" ("Editorial," 2017, para. 3). While this may be true, such claims raise serious questions over what the nature of Canada's "transition" is. Using the discourse of transitional justice has faced much criticism from Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars

alike, who have argued that there are major flaws in drawing comparisons between South Africa's reconciliation process and Indigenous demands for decolonization and sovereignty. Unlike South Africa there has been no major break or rupture in the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state. Coulthard (2014) has contended that because Canada lacks a clear and formal transition, "state sanctioned approaches to reconciliation must ideologically manufacture such a transition by allocating the abuses of settler colonization to the dustbins of history, and/or purposely disentangle processes of reconciliation from questions of settlercoloniality [sic] as such" (p. 108).

Short (2005) also has argued that in settler states, such as Canada and Australia, where there has been no restructuring of state institutions, or meaningful shift to Indigenous sovereignty, a reconciliation framework faces serious challenges in building common ground. Matsunaga (2016) echoed this claim by stating that by applying a "one size fits all model" of transitional justice, the Government of Canada intends reconciliation to only be about changing attitudes and beliefs, and in doing so avoids and silences conversations about greater structural change. In other words, transitional justice in Canada has become loosely understood as a process of reconciling relationships and changing perceptions, not about land, sovereignty, and justice. Despite this underlying problem, processes attempting reconciliation are underway and demand closer attention from educators.

### *Approaches to reconciliation in Canada*

The differing approaches to reconciliation reveal that there is no consensus on what it is, or how to best proceed. Denis and Bailey (2016) have identified two major approaches to reconciliation in Canada which they refer to as the "mainstream / TRC vision" and the "radical" vision. They argue that mainstream Indigenous organizations, such as the Assembly of First Nations and Reconciliation Canada, support the framework and recommendations of the TRC for reform-based changes in pursuit of "local level healing and relationship building" (p. 140). This approach is often the most visible and accessible form of reconciliation, promoted by mainstream media outlets and government policy.

A more radical vision has emerged from scholars and activists affiliated with the University of Victoria's Indigenous Governance Program such as Alfred (2009), Cornassel (2012), and Coulthard (2014), who have argued that in its current form, reconciliation is a form of pacification, assimilation, and ultimately re-colonization of Indigenous peoples and nations. The argument made is that reconciliation is asking Indigenous people to reconcile with colonialism, rather than to dismantle it. These scholars have advocated that reconciliation cannot take place without the restitution of land and assertion of Indigenous sovereignty, or in other words, decolonization. The contested notion of "decolonization" has been explored by Tuck and Yang (2012) who

have argued that using the term “decolonization” vaguely, as a reference to the process of changing beliefs and attitudes, or as a metaphor, is a set of evasions or “‘settler moves to innocence,’ that problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity” (p. 1). In this view, reconciliation should not be mistaken for, or made synonymous with, decolonization, as it fails to address Indigenous sovereignty and functions instead to maintain the nation state.

These differing perspectives on reconciliation and decolonization offer very different implications for what reconciliation might mean, or can mean, for schools. Engaging teachers and students in this conversation may complicate how we teach and learn about Indigenous / non-Indigenous relations, but it becomes necessary considering the task at hand. Understanding the current attitudes and perceptions of non-Indigenous or settler Canadians also has value. Denis and Bailey (2016) conducted in-depth interviews with 40 non-Indigenous Canadians who attended at least one TRC event and found that these “engaged settler Canadians” (p. 144) were far more likely to support the “mainstream” version of reconciliation as promoted by the TRC including “relationship building and supporting Indigenous healing and cultural revitalization” (p. 144). It is important to note that the participants were described by the authors as “engaged,” and the perspectives of most Canadians, who did not attend any TRC events, is not fully clear. Furthermore, a recent report by Reconciliation Canada (2017) provided the results of an online survey using representative samples of Indigenous ( $n = 521$ ) and non-Indigenous Canadians ( $n = 1,529$ ). This study found that 62% of Indigenous respondents felt there is a great need for reconciliation in comparison with 46% of non-Indigenous Canadians. In response to a question about the need to develop cultural and historical awareness programs for K-12 curriculum, 66% of Indigenous respondents strongly supported such programs, compared with 41% of non-Indigenous respondents. This initial study shows that settler Canadians lag behind Indigenous peoples in their desire to see change. The report maintains a positive outlook, concluding that there is an alignment of views on the importance of reconciliation and a window of opportunity to make change (Reconciliation Canada, 2017). Despite this hopeful stance, significant problems remain in implementing the TRC’s recommendations.

A commonly identified problem that could be addressed through history education is Canadians’ lack of historical knowledge about Indigenous history and settler colonialism. The idea that Canadians know little of their shared colonial past is not new. In 1996, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) “suggested that Canadians are simply unaware of the history...and that there is little understanding of the origins and evolution of the relationship” (Simon, 2005, p. 94). Dion (2009) argued that “Canadians ‘refuse to know’ that the racism that fueled colonization sprang from a system that benefits all non-Aboriginal people, not just European settlers of long ago” (p. 57). Dion

contended that this refusal to know is an obstacle to confronting and challenging the racist past and how it lives on in the national consciousness. Dion further argued that settler Canadians often claim status as “perfect strangers,” imagining they know little to nothing of Indigenous people, history, or culture. The denial or erasure of settler colonialism in the nation’s collective memory was most powerfully demonstrated by former Prime Minister Stephen Harper, in his claim at a G-20 Conference in 2009 that “Canada also has no history of colonialism” (“Really Harper,” 2009, para. 1). Challenging the myth of benevolent colonialism, or non-existent colonialism, necessitates a concerted effort from K-12 educators, with specific attention from history teachers.

### CHALLENGES FOR HISTORY EDUCATION

History education in schools offers an important and essential opportunity to challenge misconceptions and denials of Canada’s past and present. Seixas (2012) has argued that “formal state sponsored history education represents a crucial engagement with historical consciousness” (p. 126). I use the term historical consciousness here as partially explained by Seixas (2017), as “a subject’s historically situated orientation to the temporal world...expressed through narratives that embody a moral orientation” (p. 595). In this understanding, developing the historical consciousness of students involves addressing their relationship to past, present, and future, through a process of thinking historically in K-12 classrooms. Seixas (2012) explained that although extracurricular narratives impact students’ understandings of history, the nature of public schooling offers an important and unique opportunity for young people to engage with the past in a meaningful way.

The past decade has seen a significant shift in the way history is taught in schools in Canada. A historical thinking approach, as articulated by Seixas (2017) and promoted by the Historical Thinking Project ([www.historicalthinking.ca](http://www.historicalthinking.ca)), has been widely adopted across provincial and territorial social studies and history curricula. Historical thinking is based upon a set of procedural concepts derived from the academic discipline of history, such as continuity and change, cause and consequence, and historical significance. They are designed to help students understand what it means to “do history” and in the process, develop their critical historical literacy. Seixas (2017) has argued that the historical thinking concepts are generative for teaching and learning because “they function, rather, as problems, tensions, or difficulties that demand comprehension, negotiation and, ultimately, an accommodation that is never a complete solution” (p. 5). Students’ ability to think historically is then understood as their ability to demonstrate competence in negotiating productive solutions to the problems tied to the procedural concepts. This model, which is supported by a large and growing body of international research in history education, provides a valuable set of concepts for teaching about historical injustice and reconciliation in Canada.



The goals of K-12 history education have long been oriented towards cultivating national identity and cohesion, creating active and engaged citizens, and developing critical and disciplinary thinking competency. While these objectives, and their relative emphasis, are ever evolving, the desire for a usable past in state mandated history education is undeniable. Calls for history education to play a role in reconciliation carry on that tradition. In most provinces and territories reconciliation is now being added as a core component of the curriculum. For example, Ontario's former Premier Kathleen Wynne stated in a 2016 speech on Ontario's commitment to reconciliation that the government was working "to ensure our education curriculum teaches every child in Ontario the truth about our past and what it means for all of us today" (Office of the Premier, 2016, para. 18). As increased attention is placed on teaching the history of Indigenous / non-Indigenous relations, there is an urgency for history educators to consider the conceptual challenges not addressed in policy and curricular changes. Intertwining the field of history education with the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is a complex and contentious process. To better understand this complexity, I outline three significant problem areas that history educators must attend to, when engaging with the concepts of reconciliation, decolonization, and historical injustice. While these challenges are significant and remain unresolved, I argue that there is space, a need, and possibilities for history education to teach for reconciliation.

### ***Narrativity***

While the term narrativity has multiple meanings and a complex history of usage, I adopt it here to explore the ways in which historical narratives are constructed, reified, and challenged in schools, and in public memory. Telling, teaching, and learning the story, or stories, of Canada will always be contested by competing ideologies and identities. Recently, media commentators and historians criticized the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's (CBC) 2017 history miniseries, *Canada: The Story of Us*, citing misrepresentation, inaccuracies, and ignored narratives, forcing the CBC to apologize (Peritz, 2017). History in schools has long undergone the same scrutiny and criticism in its portrayal of different peoples, communities, nations, and identities. The inclusion of previously ignored racialized, ethnic, cultural, and gendered groups into the Canadian grand narrative has seen debate in the so called "history wars," although these multiple narratives have entered the curriculum and textbooks across the country with general acceptance and support from history teachers (Osborne, 2011). This is not to uncritically accept that a more inclusive approach is adequate, or not problematic itself. As Stanley (2006) has argued, a progress-oriented Eurocentric narrative, designed to support the nation state, remains dominant in schools despite a greater inclusion of previously ignored or marginalized identities.

New curricula, textbooks, and resources have imagined a more inclusive narrative arc, but for the most part the Canadian story still follows a progressive nation building structure. A more complex representation of Indigenous peoples and perspectives has been included, but this remains problematic for several reasons, including ongoing misrepresentations and failures to address notions of Indigenous sovereignty and resurgence that are not tied to the nation state. History education research has demonstrated that representations of Indigenous peoples in Canadian curriculum and textbooks have historically been presented in limited and problematic ways. Clark (2007) has identified categories of textbook depictions of Indigenous peoples across time, which included spectator, savage, exotic, problem, uniquely spiritual, protestor, and invisible. This othering of Indigenous peoples outside of the dominant national narrative is one challenge. Second, as Lévesque (2016) has argued, integrating Indigenous perspectives into the Canadian narrative is more than a matter of inclusion, it provides a unique challenge: “While most teachers – and publishers – are in the process of integrating more stories *about* Indigenous peoples, there is less consensus on *how* and *why* we should teach these” (para. 1). In other words, increasing the amount of historical content relating to Indigenous peoples in the prescribed curriculum does not consider why embedding this content within narrative structures designed to promote and maintain the nation state is problematic. In response to these problems, I pose the question: how should Canadian historical narratives, and their representations in curricula and texts, be revised or rethought with reconciliation in mind?

### *Temporality*

I use the term temporality to engage in a conversation about how we understand our present relation to historical events and structures that have ongoing legacies. An engagement with temporality helps make clear what traditions and structures we see ourselves as part of, and which ones we do not. Political discourse around reconciliation has often detached and placed colonial injustice solely in the past. As former Prime Minister Harper stated in the official government apology for the Residential Schools, this was “a sad chapter in our history” (Government of Canada, 2010, para. 1). This way of talking about historical injustice reveals one way Canadians think about the history of colonialism in Canada. Harper’s statement, much echoed in the media, temporally frames settler colonialism as an event of the past, one that is disconnected from our present society and current institutions. A discourse that temporalizes historical injustice as a “dark part” or “sad chapter” in our history works to deny or silence both broader historical narratives and ongoing injustices. In this view, reconciliation becomes a contradictory process that both acknowledges collective guilt and an ongoing debt to survivors, while at the same time sharply isolating the injustice and abuse as an error of a previous time emerging from an unconnected set of institutions and structures.

This is not to argue that attitudes and perceptions have not changed. The Indigenous-settler relationship has evolved, but the discourse around reconciliation often denies continuities in settler colonialism that have not gone away. The denial of colonial continuities in Canadian institutions and society more generally presents a major barrier in rethinking and reframing relationships. This denial works to imagine historical injustice as a set of discrete historical events that can be redressed in the present through apology and financial compensation. As Wolfe (2006) has argued, “settler colonialism is not an event, it is a structure” (p. 388). If, as Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars continue to argue, colonization is not over, but an ongoing structural relationship, then there are important implications for how we teach and learn about Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations. Addressing this will require teachers and students to think about the continuities of colonialism, as well as the changes. To this challenge, I extend Coulthard’s (2014) argument, to pose the question: How can teachers avoid allocating the abuses of settler colonialism to the dustbins of history?

### *Identity*

Asking non-Indigenous educators, such as myself, to consider how they are attached to, or implicated in, settler colonialism is another tension within this process. This is partly because, as Dion (2007) has discussed, there is a paralysis of fear pervading non-Indigenous teachers when it comes to teaching about Indigenous peoples: “The fear of offending, the fear of introducing controversial subject material, the fear of introducing content that challenges students’ understanding of the dominant stories of Canadian history” (p. 331). Helping non-Indigenous teachers and students reflect on, and rethink, how their identities, both individual and collective, are connected to Canada’s history of colonialism is essential. For non-Indigenous Canadians, this is not to promote a sense of guilt, but to help them understand the ways in which they benefit from colonialism, despite perhaps only living in Canada for a short period of time. Regan (2010) referred to this process in her book, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, arguing that for reconciliation to occur, it is settler Canadians who must confront their mentalities, attitudes, and lack of understanding of Indigenous history and ways of knowing. Asking a teacher or students to confront their identity and its implications has potential to be difficult, uncomfortable, and risky; yet, it remains an essential component of developing a stronger sense of how historical injustice informs the present. Thus, I ask, how might teachers and students ethically reflect on their individual and collective identities and how they are implicated in the colonial project?

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR HISTORY EDUCATION

As increased attention and time is being placed on teaching about the historical and contemporary relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians, I argue that there is urgency for an increase in specific research relating to history education and reconciliation in settler colonial states. Cole (2007) has argued that history education deserves an important seat at the table in any state that is undergoing a process of transitional justice, claiming it can enhance critical thinking, empathy skills, and provide students with the “ability to disagree about interpretations of the past and their implications for present social issues” (p. 126). Pursuing these learning outcomes is both challenging and essential. Much existing research has focused on the possibilities for, and impact of, history education in post-conflict societies emerging out of civil war, human rights abuses, or genocide (Cole, 2007; Paulson, 2015). Relatively few studies exist on history teaching as a reconciliatory or reparative act in ongoing settler colonial states such as Canada, with a few notable exceptions (Cannon, 2018; Dion, 2007; Donald, 2009; Ng-A-Fook & Milne, 2014; Tupper, 2014). Research that brings the historical thinking approach and scholarship in Indigenous education into conversation has begun to emerge, though as McGregor (2017) notes there has been little overlap between the two fields. Further investigation is needed on how existing movements in history education, such as historical thinking, might be mobilized or adapted in relation to the challenges made by the TRC’s Calls to Action.

The existing state of research and practice in history and social studies education in Canada provides fertile ground for this conversation. As Seixas (2017) has noted, most provinces and territories in Canada have now shifted their history and social studies curricula to focus on disciplinary concepts of historical thinking, while simultaneously incorporating more Indigenous content. In considering how history educators might respond to the challenges I have identified, the historical thinking concepts provide an important entry point and model for engaging with historical injustice. However, I do acknowledge that merging historical thinking with Indigenous ways of knowing presents additional epistemological issues that have previously been raised (Seixas, 2012; McGregor, 2017), though I do not address these concerns here. I also consider research that has explored the teaching of historical trauma and “critical pedagogies of remembrance” (Simon, 2005; 2013; Zembylas & Bekerman, 2008), as they also present pedagogical tools for engaging with the Calls to Action and the challenges they present. For each problem area I have already defined, I suggest potential avenues for history educators considering how to teach and think about historical injustice and reconciliation.

*(Counter) narrative opportunities*

Constructing and imagining historical narratives that encompass reconciliation presents one of the most important challenges for history teachers. Deciding how we teach and learn the story of colonization matters greatly. As discussed earlier, narratives in Canadian school history have attempted to include and integrate multiple perspectives while still maintaining the importance of a multicultural and inclusive national identity. However, all forms of nation building narratives present a problem for some visions of reconciliation. If, as some Indigenous scholars have argued, the true goal of reconciliation should be for Indigenous peoples to be sovereign from the nation of Canada, then a nation building narrative is inadequate, no matter how inclusive it attempts to be. As Nagy (2013) contended, “reconciliation through decolonization is decidedly not a Canadian nation building project” (p. 20). This is extended by Alfred (2009), who has argued that reconciliation should be about dismantling Indigenous ties to the Canadian state entirely, alongside the restitution of land. In this view, any approach that celebrates multiple or interconnected Canadian narratives is insufficient. Further, Short (2005) has argued,

tying justice for indigenous people to a nation building framework effectively places a (colonial) ceiling on indigenous aspirations and incorporating Aboriginality into the cultural fabric of a settler nation inherently weakens Indigenous claims based on their traditional separate-ness from settler culture. (p. 274)

This is also potentially true for constructing a new narrative for Canadian history usable in K-12 classrooms that attempts to incorporate Indigenous content, voices, and ways of knowing.

Narrative possibilities that attempt to challenge the nation building story have been imagined. Anderson (2017) has developed a framework that identifies three potential narrative structures for history education, including a progressive Eurocentric master narrative, a multicultural, progressive-mosaic master narrative, and a counter narrative that examines multiple identities and challenges conceptions of nationalism and nation building. Anderson defined her third “counter national narrative” as not a template, but rather an approach that captures “competing, omitted, or silenced national narratives through parallel or alternative forms of Canadian identity” (p. 21). This approach aims to address decolonization and include Indigenous epistemologies by focusing on ways to counter the dominant or master narratives that rely on nation building and Enlightenment notions of progress. Marker (2011) has also argued that the commonly used narrative frameworks are inadequate, stating that “for Indigenous peoples, the history of Canada as a nation state is a colonizing way of thinking about people, relationships, and land” (p. 110). Instead of centering a narrative on the nation state, Marker and Anderson have suggested that all stories might focus on our relationship with the land.

Using such a counter narrative approach to teach Indigenous perspectives and voices has potential, though care must be taken not to reify Indigenous peoples as *other* or assume that there is one preordained Indigenous counter narrative that can be mobilized by all teachers. Alfred and Cornstassel (2005) remind us that there is a danger in an age of state sanctioned reconciliation that colonialism becomes the only story of Indigenous peoples. Finding a way to address multiple overlapping and competing narratives remains a significant challenge for history teachers. Students might work to reconstruct the history of Canada through a counter narrative from a perspective that purposefully aims to de-center the narrative of the nation state, yet the narrative of the development of Canada over time should not be outright rejected. It is clear that questions remain over how narrative might be operationalized in history classrooms in a way that is clear and meaningful to students and teachers.

The historical thinking concepts provide one way for teachers and students to address Indigenous narratives, perspectives, and voices. For example, students might explore causes and consequences of the Indian Residential School system that would encourage them to examine the underlying structural context of settler colonialism or examine primary source evidence such as the Bryce Report (Bryce, 1907) or oral testimonies of survivors. More broadly, the historical thinking concept of historical significance asks us to consider whose stories we tell and why they get told. Students could use this problem “to articulate the narratives that may be legitimately constructed around a particular event, resonating in a larger community” (Seixas, 2017, p. 598). By opening up history to be understood as a human constructed narrative, not a set list of facts, historical thinking provides an essential starting place for challenging existing narratives that may exclude, erase, or silence Indigenous voices. These approaches could help develop a broader understanding of the narrative of settler colonialism or seek to challenge it with counter narratives from Indigenous perspectives. Finally, as Simon (2013) reminds us, reimagining or renegotiating historical narratives requires “asking non-Aboriginal Canadians where we fit into Aboriginal history, not just where Aboriginal history fits into the history of Canada” (p. 136).

### *Temporality: Moving injustice out of the past*

A second key challenge for Canadian history teachers and students is understanding how historical injustices, such as the Indian Residential Schools, are placed into historical time, or temporalized. Helping students make sense of settler colonialism requires an examination of how it has changed over time, but also a close attention to continuities that remain. This is fundamentally a question that can be addressed using the historical thinking concept of “continuity and change.” Colonial violence or injustice towards Indigenous peoples should not be understood as a discrete event in history that can be allocated to a sad or dark chapter in the textbook. Challenging teachers and

students to think about how colonialism exists today is key. In order to do this, teachers must understand settler colonialism in Canada as a structure that has multiple intertwined elements, of which Indian Residential Schools were one part. Recognizing the changes since European colonization began is important, but so is identifying continuities about how and why colonial structures remain in place today. This helps challenge the idea that reconciliation is about reconciling the past, not the present. As Nagy (2013) has argued, “to locate the residential schools legacy in contemporary structures and policies sends a message to Canadians that residential schools cannot be compartmentalized from the Indigenous-settler relationship as a whole” (p. 19).

Likewise, examining the continuities and changes of the reconciliation process can also help students understand the changing relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. Further to this, continuity and change can be used as an entry point to how time is organized and visualized in the discipline of history. As Marker (2011) has pointed out, many Indigenous people utilize circular conceptions of time rather than a western linear understanding. Providing different perspectives on time and its organization helps challenge the notion of ongoing progress that is often tied to national narratives in the history curriculum.

### *Identity and the ethical dimension*

This final area of opportunity is perhaps the most difficult and contested. Whether history education should even play a role in moral questions and engage in affective pedagogies remains a point of debate. Seixas' (2017) conception of “the ethical dimension of history” provides one entry point into this discussion. In this concept, students engage with the problem of how we should best negotiate and respond to “past crimes and injustices whose legacies – either benefits or deficits – we live with today” (p. 602). Asking students to identify legacies of settler colonialism in contemporary society through this lens is one approach teachers might take. In examining contemporary legacies of historical injustice, it is impossible to avoid addressing individual and collective identities. This raises important concerns about how students and teachers might respond to the difficult knowledge of their implication in the reconciliation process.

This concern is taken up by the work of Simon (2005, 2013), which focused on the possibilities of collective remembering in the face of historical trauma. Simon (2005) argued that listening to and remembering testimonial accounts of historical trauma has the potential to shift public memory “with the possibility of shifting the stories non-Aboriginals tell of themselves and hence possibly renewing the terms on which to build a redefined relationship” (p. 95). Zembylas and Bekerman (2008) explored this notion further, envisioning “a pedagogy of dangerous memories,” arguing that the challenge is “whether educators can use past historical traumas to re-socialize children in a manner that

is not locked into predefined scripts and collective memories” (p. 126). This exposure to testimony of historical trauma as an affective pedagogical move is positioned as helping students work through what Britzman (1998) called “difficult knowledge” (p. 117). For Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, what constitutes difficult knowledge when learning about settler colonialism will be specific to different individuals and communities.

What is clear in both a historical thinking approach or a critical pedagogy of remembrance approach is that the identities of students and teachers are at play. In confronting injustice such as the Indian Residential Schools, Nagy (2013) has argued that “settlers need to recognize the direct, historical relationship between settler privilege and Indigenous relative deprivation. The unsettling of privilege ties further into the decolonization of identity” (p. 60). Regan (2010) also argued that by challenging myths of national identity such as Canada’s peacemaker status or the belief in benevolent colonization, settler Canadians can question how their identity is implicated in reconciliation. Engaging in ethical questions around identity and the legacy of trauma and injustice is no easy task for history teachers and students, yet I argue it is essential in engaging in the work of reconciliation.

## CONCLUSION

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Final Report and 94 Calls to Action present unique challenges and opportunities for history teachers. As new policy begins to impact teaching practice, several important questions around how to best teach Canada’s contentious past with reconciliation in mind need to be addressed. Reconciliation has been put into action in hopeful and positive ways, but more research is needed to better understand how schools are responding to these reforms, to better support teachers, teacher educators, curriculum designers, and most importantly, students. At the same time as the TRC’s report has been disseminated, history and social studies curricula in most provinces and territories has recently seen significant revisions with historical thinking becoming a core component (Seixas, 2017). This development provides teachers and students conceptual tools and approaches to thinking about historical injustice, settler colonialism, Indian Residential Schools, and the politics and process of reconciliation. Though problems do exist for applying historical thinking to Indigenous history, this model in combination with Indigenous perspectives, voices, and ways of knowing presents a way for all teachers to engage with the topic of reconciliation and historical injustice, rather than shying away from it.

This paper argues there are three conceptual challenges to teaching for and about reconciliation and historical injustice: narrativity, temporality, and identity. These challenges require history teachers and educators to engage with how Indigenous perspectives intersect or challenge other narratives, how to teach



about past and present colonial injustice, and how our collective identities are implicated in the ethical dimensions of the past. Addressing these challenges will be complicated; the possibilities I suggest require a significant amount of time and consideration from teachers. A limitation of the suggestions I make here is that teachers, who are responding to the Calls to Action and political reforms to education, must be provided with adequate support and resources to engage these ideas, in an education system that is often already overstretched. Additionally, I do not fully address the different ways of knowing that Indigenous educators might bring to these issues, both inside and outside the school history classroom. In any conversation on reconciliation, Indigenous voices must be involved. Despite these constraints and shortcomings, I maintain, throughout this article, that history and social studies teachers are uniquely positioned to play an important role in responding to the educational challenges set by the TRC's Calls to Action. History educators in teacher education programs also have a responsibility to ensure that Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers alike feel prepared to engage with their students about the history of Indigenous peoples on this land, Canada's history of colonialism, and the possibilities and constraints of truth and reconciliation.

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