



Northern Cree Elders perspectives on developing relationships for reconciliation

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Abstract

The Truth and Reconciliation call to reconciliation has received increasing attention in recent years. This research aims to discuss the notion of reconciliation in relation to Indigenous knowledge and traditional teachings. Interviews with Cree Elders directs the research methods and ways of knowing. What the Elders teach us about relationships provides a pathway towards reconciliation and the development of positive relationships. This research is qualitative in nature and examines the concepts of relationships and provides considerable discussion on the premise that Indigenous teachings provide a foundation for reconciliation. The main efforts and strategies towards reconciliation are educating Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians about the truth of our colonial past, a vision for social justice that leads to the development of positive relationships among Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians, and the appreciation of decolonisation efforts in the reconciliation process. Research findings demonstrate that strengthening oral understandings of the Cree

people's kinship systems in Northern Manitoba would contribute greatly to reconciliation. Therefore reconciliation can be developed by identifying and promoting teaching processes grounded in Indigenous culture. The Elders that were interviewed in this study shared their knowledge and memories of the dynamics of their Northern Cree kinship systems in which they were raised in.

Keywords: Indigenous knowledge; reconciliation, healing, decolonisation

Introduction

This article aims to discuss Indigenous-settler reconciliation in Canada in relation to Cree Elders perspectives. This issue is the notion that Indigenous peoples—*the colonised*—have been impacted by colonial policies, institutional discrimination, and colonial education. This article will articulate and discuss Indigenous knowledge as a body of ideas as it relates to reconciliation. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC, 2015) advise that

reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. In order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour. We are not there yet. The

relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples is not a mutually respectful one. (pp. 6–7)

The evidence of the lack of respectful relationships is seen in the array of research and news reports that exhibit racial discrimination against Indigenous peoples, social-economic disparities, overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples incarcerated in correctional institutions, an astonishing amount of missing and murdered Indigenous people, and a lack of justice for Indigenous peoples in the justice system (Adams, 1975; Blaut, 1992; Ermine, 1995; Hansen & Antsanen, 2015; TRC, 2015).

It is important to note that I, the researcher, is a member of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation and am therefore an insider of the group, who is inquisitive about traditional knowledge. The Elders seemed pleased to talk to me about our traditional culture, peacemaking ways, and our past. Stella, for example, indicated that it is important to pass on the stories to the next generation. William commented that if this research can help the people in the community, then he would be willing to contribute. Similarly, Jack said that he would like to participate in the study as it could benefit the people. Dennis, after getting to know me a little better expressed that the mainstream justice system has many problems and he would like to contribute to this research as it could help address some of those problems. Sylvia also expressed that she would be happy to talk about the Omushkegowuk culture on the Opaskwayak community. John commented that it is important to pass on the traditional knowledge and that he trusts that I will use this knowledge in a good way.

In their discussion of *OCAP: Ownership, Control, Access and Possession*, the Assembly of First Nations (2007) observe,

The driving force behind the defining and enforcement of the First Nations principles of OCAP is the extensive amount of harm done to FN in the name of research. To this day First Nation and other Indigenous populations have been dehumanized, treated as research ‘specimens’ rather than respected as equal human beings. In response there has been substantial research and literature devoted to cataloguing the harmful practices, and also potential new models

of engagement that can be used to regain control and ‘decolonize’ research. (p. 13)

This passage clearly illustrates the ways in which Indigenous communities are protecting themselves against harmful colonial research.

Context

Although the notion of reconciliation suggests that a positive Indigenous-settler relationship established itself in the past, this paper takes into account that such relationships were rare, and generally, the earlier relationships reflected colonial domination (Adams, 2000; Blaut, 1993; Hansen & Dim, 2019). Eurocentrism, racism, and colonisation have been major factors in the development of oppressive inequalities in Canada’s relationship with Indigenous peoples. Colonialism has impacted Indigenous peoples in a number of ways, but most importantly, Indigenous people have been socially excluded from full participation in Western society. Eurocentrism is a thread deeply woven into Western culture. Eurocentric beliefs reflect the notions of Western superiority. As a result, Eurocentric colonisers believe that they are naturally superior to the peoples outside of Europe, they believe that Indigenous peoples are inferior and in need of colonisation.

The early colonial relationship reflected Eurocentric attitudes and traditions that still shape Indigenous-settler relationships. In addition, reconciliation has been the idea that the early Indigenous-Settler relationship was positive. However, we know from evidence that Indigenous peoples were exploited by colonisers in the past, and this oppressive relationship remains to the present time (Adams, 1975; Blaut, 1993; Champagne, 2015; Hansen, 2018).

During the colonial process, Eurocentric scholars reduced Indigenous peoples to animalistic caricatures in the eyes of the settler populations. Eurocentric professors advanced scientific theories that degraded Indigenous peoples. As Adams (1975) notes, Western scholarship played a major role in creating the viewpoint that “Native people were little more than stupid beasts of burden allowed easy and uninterrupted exploitation of them as workers, and also denied them all legal and human rights” (p. 13). These

kinds of gross distortions of Indigenous peoples continue to exploit Indigenous peoples in the present day. Hansen (2019) concurs that

early in the colonial period, Europeans considered the people outside Europe to be inferior because they were culturally and racially different. The older form of racism was based on racial constructs. However newer forms of racism use culture to discriminate against others. (p. 3)

In Canada, reconciliation has been presented in ways that maintain the oppression of Indigenous nations. Corntassel (2009) observes that “we have seen how reconciliation as framed by Canada has served to legitimize and reinforce colonial relationships, thus maintaining the status quo” (p. 155). Therefore, it is crucial that Indigenous peoples’ perspectives and voices are not overshadowed by the dominant discourse.

In his analysis of the missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada, Royle (2017) documents that European men have been violent towards Indigenous women for a long time. Royle (2017) writes,

in the waves of settlement in Canada, European men were sexually violent towards Indigenous women; creating a transformative property in the lives of Indigenous women in that Indigenous women faced a shift from a reputation under egalitarian values to a reputation under patriarchal values (p. 2).

The early colonial relationships saw Indigenous women abused by European men who believed that Indigenous women were inferior and powerless (Champagne, 2015; Hansen & Dim, 2019; TRC, 2015).

The Métis historian Howard Adams (2000) observes that the early colonisers appropriated Indigenous and claimed it, as they viewed Indigenous peoples to be “subhuman, so Indigenous occupancy did not constitute human residence. The Europeans claimed that they have ‘discovered’ vacant land and therefore were free to claim it as their own” (p. 46). Such exploitations of Indigenous peoples, lands, and resources is a very old practice. Adams (2000) maintains that “Europeans set up policies allowing them to commit atrocities against Native peoples with impunity. Native people had no legal recourse to protect their land or their homes

from European plunders” (p. 45). The Indigenous peoples were pushed out of their lands, and the settler society developed, out of which a reconciliation calling emerged.

Within the context of reconciliation, residential school survivors are unique in their healing journeys. Some heal, while others continue to suffer in silence. Reconciliation and healing, therefore, begins at the individual level. For Indigenous peoples, it is at the mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical dimensions. Healing then spirals outward into repairing the family, community, and nation. Therefore, reconciliation is about building relations within and outward. It requires decolonisation of settler structures of power and privilege and then the construction of respectful relations, balance, and harmony.

Western history is subjective, and there is very little discussion of the colonisation and suppression of Indigenous peoples in most history books. In his analysis of Indigenous storytelling, truth-telling, and community approaches to reconciliation, Corntassel (2009) observes,

The nation-state of Canada offers a very different version of history than those of Indigenous nations—one that glosses over the colonial legacies of removing Indigenous peoples from their families and homelands when enforcing assimilationist policies, all of which were intended to eradicate Indigenous nations. (p. 138)

This passage demonstrates that the colonial violence against Indigenous peoples is kept out of mind out of sight. The TRC (2015) concurs that the residential experience was

hidden for most of Canada’s history, until Survivors of the system were finally able to find the strength, courage, and support to bring their experiences to light in several thousand court cases that ultimately led to the largest class-action lawsuit in Canada’s history (p. v)

The impact of Indigenous colonisation makes reconciliation necessary. Before 1492, North American Indigenous people had their own social systems that enabled them to live well since time immemorial (Adams, 1975; Charlton & Hansen, 2017; Ermine, 1995; Hansen & Antsanan, 2017; TRC, 2015). However, during the colonial era, Turtle Island was the site of colonial struggles to

destroy the culture of the Indigenous people and appropriate their lands and resources. As a result, the early colonisers systematically suppressed Indigenous culture throughout the Indigenous world. Although Indigenous people have undergone forced assimilation and colonial domination, they must be credited for their capacity for resilience and this development is reflected in the survival of their oral history, stories, and traditional teachings. It is important to remember our past, and the concepts of oral traditions and Indigenous knowledge go back to unrecorded time. As Patience Elabor-Idemudia (2000) advises that “people brought up in Western societies often equate knowledge with written literature, and forget that oral traditions as embodied in folkways preceded and helped shape written language” (p. 102). Such folkways and oral traditions contain Indigenous knowledge.

Decolonisation as an Agenda

Reconciliation is intricately linked to the theory and practice of decolonisation. Reconciliation cannot be understood without understanding Indigenous history and traditional knowledge. The significance of decolonising Indigenous history and knowledge becomes clear when one considers that there is a need to understand the Indigenous experience in order to develop the knowledge necessary for reconciliation. Therefore, reconciliation is in harmony with decolonising practice as it embraces Indigenous voices as a way to reconcile relationships among Indigenous peoples and the settler society. As Smith (1999) advises, “cultural survival, self-determination, healing, restoration and social justice are engaging indigenous researchers and indigenous communities in a diverse array of projects” (p. 142). This research with Indigenous Elders is an aspect of cultural survival, self-determination, restoration, and healing. Intrinsic to this research is Elders teachings, and in respect of those teachings emerges the growing awareness that Indigenous knowledge is relevant in the present day.

Reconciliation

The TRC (2015) states,

Elders and Knowledge Keepers across the land have told us that there is no specific word for “reconciliation” in their own languages, there are many words, stories, and songs, as well as sacred objects such as wampum belts, peace pipes, eagle down, cedar boughs, drums, and regalia, that are used to establish relationships, repair conflicts, restore harmony, and make peace. The ceremonies and protocols of Indigenous law are still remembered and practiced in many Aboriginal communities. (p. 17)

The Elders indicated that the concept of reconciliation is not specifically apparent in Indigenous languages. However, reconciliation for Indigenous peoples must include Indigenous protocols and culturally appropriate knowledge that inspire healing. The TRC (2015) advises that

Reconciliation must support Aboriginal peoples as they heal from the destructive legacies of colonization that have wreaked such havoc in their lives. But it must do even more. Reconciliation must inspire Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to transform Canadian society so that our children and grandchildren can live together in dignity, peace, and prosperity on these lands we now share. (p. 8)

Therefore, reconciliation is restorative in nature. It emphasises healing and decolonisation. In addition, reconciliation involves recording the oral stories, histories, and inherent teachings that are carried by Elders. However, in order to do this, one must analyse the processes and structures that influence positive relationships. The reconciliations the Elders speak of, for example, has been principally that of identifying and reaffirming traditional teachings that serve to develop positive relationships in the community.

Within the context of Indigenous community development, Lane et al. (2002) note that “Aboriginal communities and the Aboriginal ‘healing movement’ have long argued that healing and community development are inseparable” (p. 23). This passage illustrates that Indigenous community development and healing are interconnected. For many Indigenous people, traditional teachings, ceremonies and customs inspire the capacity for healing. (Champagne, 2015; Chandler & Lalonde; 1998; Charlton & Hansen, 2017; TRC, 2015). As Chandler and Lalonde (1998) note that Indigenous communities “that have taken active steps to

preserve and rehabilitate their own cultures are shown to be those in which youth suicide rates are dramatically lower” (p. 191). Therefore, Indigenous cultural teachings serve to promote wellbeing in Indigenous communities.

How Residential Schools and Colonial Education Impacts Indigenous People

In Canada, the education system has been used to colonise Indigenous people and suppress their knowledge and culture. As McGuire–Kishebakabaykwe (2010) observes,

Whole generations of children were taken away with some Anishinaabe families having multiple generations of children removed. Yet, in spite of these overwhelming challenges, Anishinaabe still maintain their identities, languages, and cultures. This continuity is community resilience. (p. 122)

This passage illustrates that Anishinaabe have maintained their languages, also known as Ojibwa and Salteaux languages, and culture in spite of generations of colonisation and residential schools. These Anishinaabe-Indigenous people occupy the lands of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario. However, colonialism has various forms and continues to marginalise Indigenous people in the present day. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) point out that schools reproduce inequality in systemic ways, such as

mandatory culturally biased testing; “ability” tracking; a primarily White teaching force with the power to determine which students belong in which tracks; cultural definitions of intelligence, what constitutes it, and how it is measured; and standards of what constitutes good behavior as determined by White teachers and administration. Rather than serving as the great equalizer, schools function in actual practice to reproduce racial inequality. (p. 129)

This passage demonstrates how the education system discriminates against Indigenous students and racial minorities, and suggest the ways in which racial disparities in society are reproduced. Blaut (1992) concurs that racist practice is seen in the array of culturally biased practices in the education system, which serves to create and sustain racial inequality. Blaut (1992) writes,

The people of one race - pardon me: one ethnic group - demonstrate greater abilities than those of other ethnic groups, abilities in IQ, ACT, and SAT test-taking, in “need achievement motivation”, in avoidance of criminality, and so on. Given that they have these higher realized abilities, they should be given greater rewards. They should be admitted to college, be granted Ph.D.s and tenure, and the rest. And so racist practice persists under the guidance of a theory which actually denies the relevance of race. The differences between humans which justify discriminatory treatment are differences in *acquired* characteristics: in culture. (p. 290)

These kinds of educational standards and practices demonstrate the nature of cultural racism in the education system. In other words, cultural racism replaces the racial category “race” for the cultural category “culture”. Educational institutions today generally do not teach about a superior race; but rather a superior culture. However, Canada’s Indigenous peoples are turning to their traditional teachings in an effort to cope with and overcome centuries of colonisation and racism. Since this study deals with reconciliation, we present the perspectives held by Indigenous Cree Elders with respect to the notions of developing positive relationships. Interview results demonstrate that Indigenous knowledge is significant to develop the knowledge necessary for reconciliation.

Research Model

This study applies the tools of qualitative research. The specific Indigenous methods utilised is storytelling, as well as open-ended interviewing. Six Cree Elders were interviewed, and they shared stories on *how* the teaching of positive relationships was developed in Cree communities. Culturally appropriate research principles were applied. The Elders were offered tobacco and cloth immediately before the interview to demonstrate reciprocity and respect for sharing their experience and knowledge. Since interpretation and translation of knowledge is lost during the translation process, it is important to note that the Elders, the participants in this study, are fluent in both Cree and English; however, the interviews were conducted in the English language.

Data Collection Methods

Data was collected using Indigenous and ethnographic tools that utilised traditional protocol for knowledge gathering. These traditional protocols included food, cloth, tobacco, and sweetgrass offerings to demonstrate my respect for the Elders sharing their teachings. The ethnographic research methods incorporated into the data collection process include open-ended interviewing techniques, field notes, audio-taped conversations, and general observations. The interviewing conversations were tape-recorded with permission and were conducted on the Opaskwayak Cree Nation Swampy Cree territory of Northern Manitoba.

A qualitative study is suitable when the research questions ask “how” (Creswell, 1998, p. 17). In this study, for example, a significant research question asks, “how did the teachings you received from your family and elders influence relationships in your life?” Such a research question demonstrates a qualitative study. According to Creswell (1998) qualitative research is conducted when “the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (p. 15). According to Creswell (1998), qualitative research provides the following

1. A systematic procedure for inquiry.
2. Access to natural cultural settings.
3. Collection of a variety of empirical resources including
 - case study,
 - personal experience,
 - interviews,
 - introspection,
 - observation in cultural context, and
 - historical, international, and visual texts.

These methods illustrated by Creswell (1998) fit well with the Indigenous research methods identified by Wilson (2004), and it also harmonizes with Hookimaw-Witt’s (2006) research which centred on a Cree worldview and Swampy Cree culture and feminism. There is much harmony in the relationship between

qualitative research and Indigenous research. Both espouse that Indigenous peoples have a voice in the research. Indigenous research today is much different than the colonising research of the past, which silenced, marginalised, and misrepresented Indigenous voices (Adams, 1975; Ermine, 1995; Hansen & Antsanen, 2017; Smith, 1999; Wotherspoon & Hansen, 2013).

Research Questions

1. How did the teachings you received from your family and elders influence relationships in your life?
2. Has the Western law way changed relationships between women and men, and families in your community?

Ethical Considerations

For the Swampy Cree, culturally appropriate research espouses the practice of reciprocity. Each Elder was offered tobacco, cloth, coffee, and food. Hookimaw-Witt (2006), a Swampy Cree scholar, tells us that she brings “food and make a meal for the elder before I start my inquiry into her/his knowledge. With this gesture I give back what I will take with me” (p. 101). Research with Indigenous people ought to honour the practice of reciprocity for ethical considerations. Although this study was approved by the ethics outlined by the University of Regina it has also been conducted by an Indigenous researcher who lived on the Opaskwayak territory and who utilised culturally appropriate research methods. The Elders had an opportunity to change and approve the transcripts that emerged from the interviews. The Elders also had the choice to have their names acknowledged, meaning their names will be noted in the study, or the right to remain anonymous.

Introducing the Elders

Stella Neff is from Misipawistik Cree Nation or Grand Rapids First Nation, a Cree community some 400 kilometres north of Winnipeg on Highway 6. The Cree word *Misipawistik* translates as rushing rapids and is located at the departure of the Saskatchewan River before flowing into Lake Winnipeg.

Sylvia Hansen is an Elder from the Opaskwayak Cree Nation. She was born in 1937 and for the most part, grew up in her home community. Like most Cree children of her era, she was shipped

off to residential school during her childhood. Her first language is Cree, and she is knowledgeable of the stories, unspoken nuances, and values within Omushkegowuk societies. She shared her perspective and experience of life on Opaskwayak Cree Nation.

William G. Lathlin is a former chief of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation. William has a sense of humour, and he is a good speaker in both the Cree and English languages. William knew much about me, my family, my relatives, and he knew my grandfather; thus, he is considered to be a friend of the family. William has much knowledge of the people of Opaskwayak Cree Nation, and I enjoyed visiting with him and listening to the stories about traditional life.

John Martin is a traditional Elder. John was born and raised on the Mosakahiken Cree Nation or Moose Lake reserve, which is situated about 75 kilometres northeast of The Pas, Manitoba. Like many Aboriginal children of his generation, he too was shipped off to the residential school during the 1950s. Having survived that ordeal, he went on to work as a welder for nine years in Winnipeg, before returning to his community in 1973. He has earned the respect of his community. John performs sweat lodge ceremonies, feasts, and traditional weddings.

Jack is the pseudonym for one Elder. As mentioned previously, one Elder chose to remain anonymous, so a pseudonym was used to refer to him (Therefore his true name will not appear in this publication or any other publication). Jack has lived all his life in Omushkegowuk territory. He grew up on the trap line and did not attend residential school.

Dennis Thorne, an Elder of mixed Indigenous ancestry, primarily that of Cree descent, but including Dakota and Ojibwa, was born in 1939 in Wanless, Manitoba, a small Métis community located about 50 kilometres north of Opaskwayak Cree Nation on Highway 10. Dennis provided significant insights concerning the nature of traditional culture and justice in tribal societies, as well as addictions. Furthermore, Dennis has worked effectively with Indigenous prisoners in various federal penitentiaries across Canada. During the early 1980s, Dennis helped build some of the first

sweat lodges behind Canadian prison walls in the Kingston, Ontario region. He also worked for nine years at Chief Poundmaker's Treatment Centre in Alberta, Canada.

Presenting the Findings

In responding to question one "how did the teachings you received from your family and elders influence relationships in your life?" Stella recalled that

A lot of the teachings that I received as a mother were received from my grandmother. I would say from our part that my grandmother and my immediate family who would come to camp with us, they used to be the ones who would teach about relationships. How to raise children it came directly from my grandmother...by observing relationships we were very lucky because our family was so together and so traditional that we've learned about relationships that way, and our grandmother was always there, the extended family was always there, and we were never left alone. We had teachings from everywhere, we had teachings from my father. He would take us out hunting or trapping to teach us how to set snares, and we observed my grandfather when he was cutting the moose and my grandmother when she was making pemmican. All of these were done and they would call us to come and stand by the grandparents to see how this was done. And you see that a lot of our education was done by observing how it happened (Stella)

The response by Stella provides insight into the nature of relationships. For Stella, the family is influential in the development of relationships. In terms of gender, for example, Stella shared that young males were normally taught by men. At the same time, the knowledge taught to young males (i.e., the moose meat process) was also passed on to young females. Therefore, the learning process is holistic. Although in general, women processed the food (e.g., making pemmican) that men harvested (i.e., moose meat), women also learned about the process of hunting, which suggests that young men also learned about the process of processing the food. Therefore, gender roles in Cree culture are flexible. Furthermore, Stella revealed that her education was built on what she observed.

In his response to question one, William states, that

Well, I was messed up; I didn't know whether to believe them or not. You see, I lost that trust when I went to the residential school. To trust our way or the other way, and that's when I got messed up, and I was starting to dream. So when it turned to my turn to teach the children, I didn't know what to do. But one thing I knew how to do is to make sure that my children had a good academic education, which they have, which I never did get; but in doing that, I guess I robbed them of their spirituality. So that now they are searching for that. I told them that they had to find that their own way they're still young and they're still able to do it (William)

William's response illustrates that the teachings he received from his family influenced his relationships in the family. However, William lost trust from his residential school experience. He is a residential school survivor who continues to speak his language, and he encourages his children to choose their own spirituality, which is an indication of the Cree cultural value of non-interference.

In her response, Sylvia states,

Well I can see what they meant now after a long time ago. I can see what they meant, because a long time ago those old men used to talk about how it's going to be harder later on. They say there was going to be more people coming to this land and it's going to be very hard for the people. That's exactly what's happening right now. The natives you see them walking around, and they don't get hired on anywhere. I think that's what they must have seen in their vision. So I guess it must have been true what they meant (Sylvia)

Sylvia explained that the interpretations of the stories can be difficult, as the Elders' often say that the lessons we are taught are sometimes not understood immediately, in some cases, the meaning emerges years later.

In his response to the same question, John states,

When I was growing up, you never speak out against your elders or your parents, you have to respect that. You have to honor them, so learning, listening to learn it was a big part, when we listen and also telling us this is what you need to do, this is what you have to do, and it would start to fall into place, all things that they teach you, you learned. It was a time that when growing up in the community we didn't have no power or electricity, no running water, everything was done by hand, we had to saw, cut wood by hand, saw

would be by hand, get water from the lake, make sure that we fill up their ...[pause]... my mom would say 'go help that old man, make sure he has that' especially in the wintertime, when they need to stay warm. Make sure they have water, so we did that, and we learned to respect those old people like that, and they would tell us things too, they would tell us stories, these kinds of stories that would help us in life, these are the teaching stories and when you grow up with the stories. Just like when the creator of sense somebody to help you, are having a hard time, and so you have to listen to that person that the creator sends, a lot of times it is the elders, they tell us of what to do, but now a lot of times we don't listen to them, and we don't get that helped that we want, because we don't listen to them. These are the things that the old people taught us, listen and obey. That's the message (John)

John's response shows an illustration that the Elders were esteemed in the culture of the Cree. It was the Elders who taught lessons for life through the stories of the people. John also suggests that and that it would do Indigenous people well to maintain the traditional teachings in contemporary times.

In response to question two, "has the Western law way changed relationships between women and men, and families in your community?" William states,

The rearing of our children has really had an impact. Where we had our way of dealing with it, and it sort of got washed away, I guess by legislation and different rules and laws that affected us that we did not understand. The impacts of it has a split up families, took away the children, and so some of the parents didn't really know the rules anymore because the state invaded the home. It affected how the parents raise the child, and the responsibilities of how to raise the child and the consequences of their action or inaction. So those things changed (William)

William's response indicates that that Western law, that is, the colonial policy of compulsory residential schooling had a devastating impact on parenting skills. As a result, the traditional parenting skills in the Cree culture eroded and changed through Western state colonial domination. Stella's statement is similar:

The residential schools took the children away, and that had an impact on our people in Grand Rapids and so when that happened and all those

things combined was a disaster for the roles of women and men because when they lost their children that's when they started fighting and angry aggression, and it was a disaster for our community. And men started going to jail, and that's when the women's roles changed forever because now they are part of the peacemaking they're part of the elders and counselling because the men aren't there anymore and that is how it impacted our culture (Stella).

This statement by Stella demonstrates that her community has been impacted by residential schools, and she refers specifically to the breakdown of the traditional roles of men and women. The statement suggests that colonisation brings cultural devastation and oppression to the Indigenous community, and this development is reflected in the loss of men to the prison system. Stella goes on to say that

When my father would talk with the other men and we would hear them talk about problems that occurred, and you would hear about these stories that they would talk about and they tell us about people who had done wrong and the consequences they had and so we would hear them talking about it and we know that this occurred, that there was conflict resolution and that also about how they were resolved, because they would talk about it and they would talk about it after the resolve and they would say Poonā 'yétum which means, well it was an interesting kind of a [pause], it was not forgiving, the word does not mean forgiving, Poonā 'yétum it means 'not thinking about it anymore'. And when that happened the conflict was resolved that's when we would hear the story Poonā 'yétum, no more thinking about it is what Poonā 'yétum means after the conflict has been resolved and that's a good thing because when you're not thinking about it, it's resolved, but if you keep thinking about it then it's not resolved [laughing], because you're still thinking about it (Stella)

This passage by Stella speaks of an aspect of reconciliation using the Cree word *Poonā 'yétum*. This Cree word helps to describe reconciliation or conflict resolution. In Stella's words "no more thinking about it is what Poonā 'yétum means; after the conflict has been resolved and that's a good thing because when you're not thinking about it, it's resolved". For Stella, Poonā 'yétum describes a healing outcome, and healing is crucial to reconciliation.

Poonā 'yétum usually refers to the capacity for people to forgive each other over time. It is a process that leads to an outcome where people stop having negative thoughts. It literally means to forgive. In the process of reconciliation, therefore, a relationship is present that gives credence to Poonā 'yétum.

The term '*Poonā 'yétum*' means forgiveness. It is important for people to work on forgiveness. However, at the same time, it must be stressed that one can never *forget* what happened, and survivors must come to understand the complex impacts. Healing is lifelong. The impacts cannot be swept under the rug. There are survivors who do not want to talk about what happened and so continue to suffer in silence. In addition, some are also influenced by religion that silences them because of their allegiance in the faith. Assimilation continues in different forms, including religious assimilation that disconnects the Indigenous worldview. As a result, there will be different responses from Elders, and thus this article recognises their diverse contributions.

Sylvia, for example, responds by teaching us that relationships with community members and the animals have changed:

It is not the same as it used to be. It is controlled by the white, you call the white regime. People do not live like the way that they lived before. In the old days when a person killed the moose or in the time of the...[pause]... just like that old lady from the states who said when they were hunting the buffalo, they put me on, smoked meat and everything was used, and nothing was wasted... At that time there was no running water and no bridges, and when a person killed the moose, they usually give out the meat. And even suppose if you buy meat for 50¢ you would get lots at that time. So they gave it out at that time. At that time in the nineteen fifties or sixties when my father used to work for the CNR, my mother said they were always running out of money. So what she used to do was make bannock and take it down to the river and trade it for fish. Like to David Cook, he was a fisherman, and he would like that bannock and he didn't have time to cook it himself so he would rather trade it for fish (Sylvia)

This response by Sylvia demonstrates the value of sharing. Sharing is crucial for community survival, and dividing foods like meat, fish, and bannock reveals the cultural value of sharing.

Sylvia's statement also suggests that the females were not powerless; they played an active role in trade, which means that females in the Opaskwayak territory are not reliant on men. Further, Sylvia's response reveals that complementary roles between men and women were significant.

In his response, Jack's statement indicates that the social and cultural way of life has undergone profound change:

The lifestyle has changed a lot...nowadays we don't even know the people living across the street. In the 1930s and 40s you hardly saw people abusing each other and stealing from each other. We have become like the dominant society, but it will be pretty tough to bring back everything (Jack)

Jack's statement illustrates that the Cree culture has changed and he is well aware of alterations such as an increase in "people abusing each other". Much of the violence that now exists in the Indigenous community is recognized by many as an outcome of the intergenerational effects of residential schools (Adams, 1975; Antsanen & Hansen, 2012; Charlton & Hansen, 2016; Champagne, 2015; TRC, 2015).

Discussion

Reconciliation is about building relationships. The notion of relationships is discussed from interviews with six Cree Elders. The Elders shared their thoughts on the development of relationships and teachings that they have heard, witnessed, or experienced in their families and communities. These thoughts were largely related to the notions of healing and reconciliation. Such traditional teachings and cultural understandings offer Indigenous ways of developing positive relationships that challenge the reproduction of unhealthy relationships. It also demonstrates that the Indigenous world is well equipped to develop reconciliation.

This study provides insights into how positive relationships developed justice in the past, and how we can use these insights to promote reconciliation in the present day. The responses by the Elders indicate that teaching in the Indigenous world is a process that is designed to ensure continued wellbeing in the community.

Learning is a process that is experienced by all. The whole process of teaching is based on emotional, spiritual, physical, and mental domains. In the contexts of traditional teachings, the Elders suggest that stories are used to teach appropriate behaviour and therefore play an important role in the development of reconciliation.

Another finding within this research was that participants expressed that jails are not good for Indigenous communities. Thus, reconciliation means that we must challenge the practice of overreliance on imprisonment as a sanctioned approach to dealing with crime. It is, in other words, to challenge the retributive and punitive discourse that is alien to Indigenous notions of justice (Champagne, 2015; Hansen, 2013; Hansen & Antsanen, 2020; TRC, 2015). Indigenous teachings from the Elders oppose incarceration as the primary response to wrongdoing. In the Elders perspective, there is always room for repairing harm, reconciliation, and restoration. We have to recognise that the disproportionate rate of incarceration for Indigenous people is part of the larger apparatus of colonisation and oppression. Indeed, the prison system can be considered an aspect of injustice and oppression that Indigenous people suffer from because of our race, culture, and colonisation combined. One could argue that the way to reconciliation is to move beyond healing obstructions. Reconciliation and decolonisation efforts hold much promise and optimism to Indigenous peoples; Indigenous stories and teachings offer a pathway to healing our communities. It offers us hope for achieving reconciliation and increased mutual respect in a transformed Canadian society.

Conclusions

This study discussed Cree Elders perspectives of cultural teachings and building relationships for reconciliation. Interviews with Cree Elders indicated that the teachings for relationships are a process that exhibits positive qualities such as respect, values, community involvement, reparation, reconciliation, and restoration. The themes observed in the interviews with the Elders reveal important features for the teaching of positive relationships such as forgiving those

who do us wrong as well as taking responsibilities for our actions. In the context of reconciliation, therefore, there is capacity for the development of more positive relationships in Canadian society. In order to do this, Indigenous people and Canadian society must deal with the negative impacts of residential schools, racism, and ongoing colonisation that impact the Indigenous population.

Reconciliation must challenge the status quo and promote the development of a more positive Indigenous-settler relationship. Therefore, reconciliation calls for respecting the voices of Indigenous peoples and their knowledge and culture. Furthermore, reconciliation must confront the reproduction of oppressive inequalities and injustices that continue to marginalise the Indigenous population such as systemic racial discrimination. The Elders have done their part by passing on the traditional teachings, which provides the knowledge necessary for reconciliation. We must do our part and honour Indigenous knowledge. The Elders provided Indigenous perspectives of reconciliation, which provide a Cree model for building relationships for reconciliation.

Recommendations

This study recommends that future research examine the extent to which Indigenous accounts of reconciliation are being promoted in public schools, colleges, and universities through Canada. Indigenous perspectives of reconciliation will contribute to advancing Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians understanding of our past, with the implication that reconciliation is to be carried out and developed for future generations. However, in order to do this, one must examine the unequal power relationships between Indigenous peoples and Western nation-states. Without acknowledging the colonial power relations between Indigenous peoples and nation-states, justice and decolonisation will be hard to achieve.

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